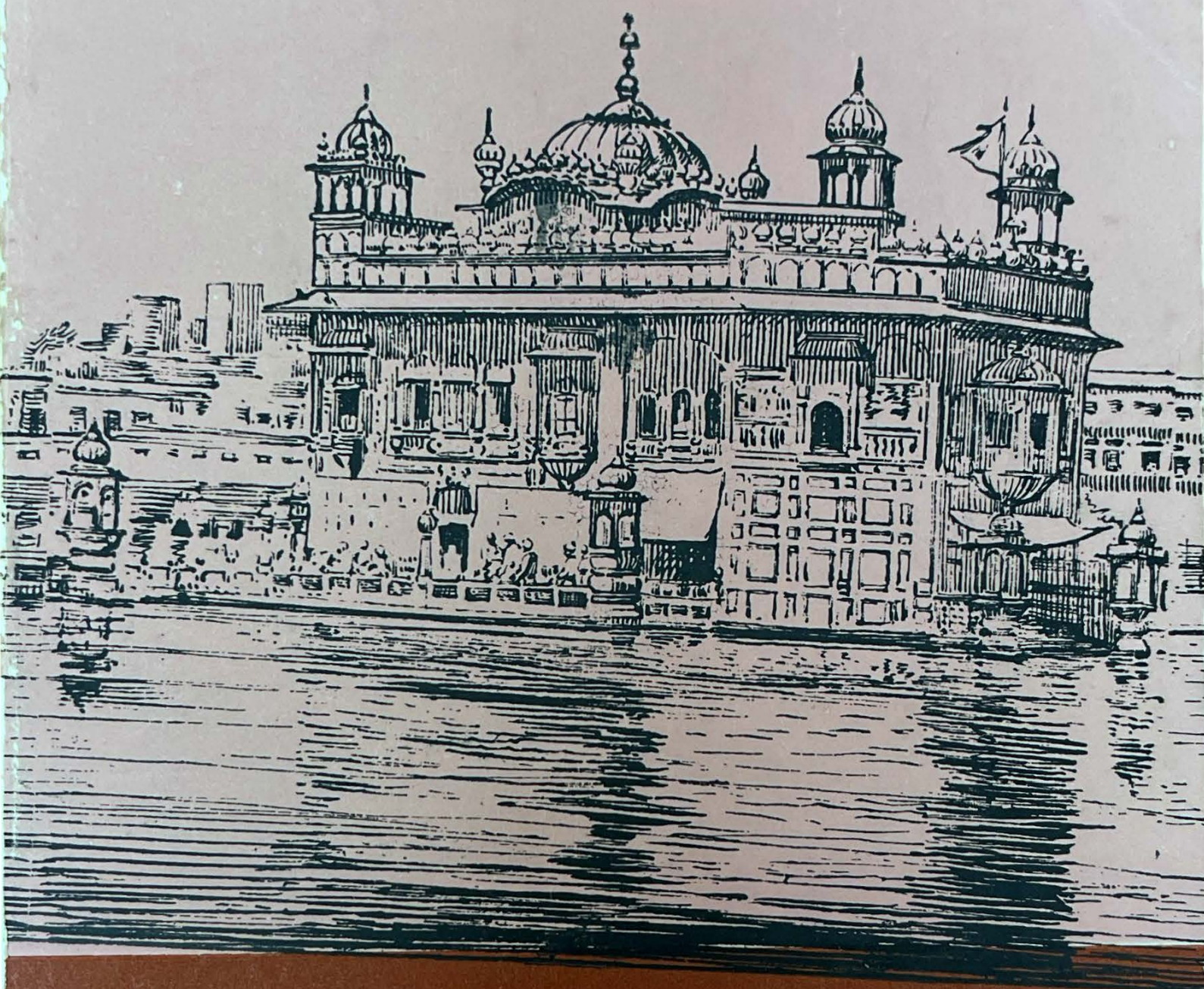


STORIES

from

SIKH HISTORY

BOOK-VII



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INTRODUCTION

In this book are told stories about Ranjit Singh, Maharaja of the Panjab. He did for India and Indians, in general, and for the Panjab and Panjabis in particular, something unique, unprecedented, most memorable, and permanently beneficial. He rescued his countrymen from centuries old subjection to fierce, fanatic, foreign rule. Thereby, he enabled his countrymen to hold their heads high, with just pride and self-respect. He established a secular and national state in which all communities were equal partners. He did something by virtue of which he endeared himself to all sections of the people, and came to be regarded by all Panjabis as their friend, liberator, and protector, as a God-sent guardian of their hearths and homes, and upholder of their honour, dignity, and self-respect.

From the status of a petty chieftain, he rose to the position of the most powerful Indian ruler of his time, whose kingdom extended from Kashmir in the north to Sindh in the south, and from Satluj in the east to Khaibar in the north-west. He was the first Indian who reversed the tide of repeated invasions from the north-west since the time of Anang Pal about seven hundred years earlier. He hurled back the invaders and raiders

to their mountain lairs. For centuries the Afghans and Pathans had become a terror to Indians, particularly to Panjabis who had to be the first victims of their raids and invasions. But Maharaja Ranjit Singh turned the tables on them, so that the Panjabis became a source of dread and terror to the erstwhile Afghans and Pathans.

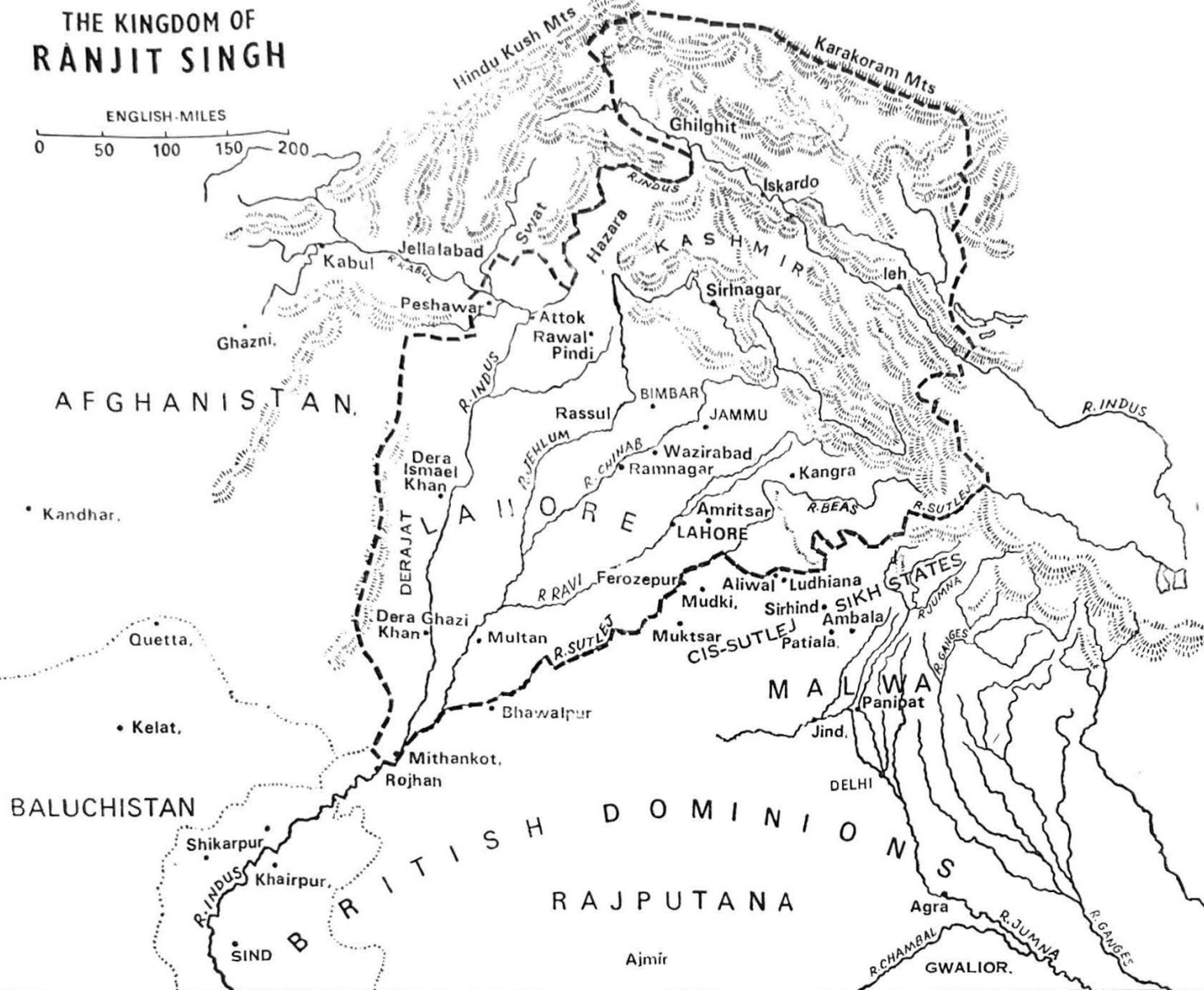
With his secular and national ideals and policy, he united all Panjabis into a community of economic and political interests. He endeared himself to the people in general, irrespective of race, religion, and creed. He was acclaimed as the national leader of all Panjabis and the national monarch of the Panjab. He was able to persuade all Panjabis to sink and forget their centuries old hatreds and animosities, that had been fostered by false notions about religion, and to live in peace and amity, like good neighbours. He made all Panjabis feel the urge of Panjabi nationalism, and regard themselves as Panjabis first, and Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs afterwards. As a result, his Sikh and Hindu troops subdued the Sikh and Hindu chieftains of the Panjab. His Muslim soldiers rejected the appeals of their Indian, Pathan, and Afghan co-religionists to crusade against the 'infidel', as they called the Maharaja of the Panjab. Instead of crusading against him, they helped him to liquidate the crusaders.

All Panjabis were happy and prosperous under him. When he died in 1839, there was universal mourning in the country. Everyone felt as if he had lost his own father and guardian. It was said that with his death, the Panjab had become a widow.

Such was the great one about whom you will read in this book. In order to appreciate adequately the full nature, importance, and significance of his works and achievements, we shall have to look back a little in history. We should know what had happened to his countrymen before his time, and what was happening to them when he took up his work. We should know what his heritage was, and then see what use he made of it in order to achieve his ideals and ambitions.

THE KINGDOM OF RANJIT SINGH

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Maharaja Ranjit Singh

MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

(1)

India had been subjected to foreign invasions from the earliest known times. The invaders came mainly from the north-west. They knew that India was rich. They also knew that it was disunited and weak; that its rulers were torn by mutual jealousies and enmities. Its people had no tinge or trace of nationalism, patriotism, or any concern for the common weal or woe. It was, therefore, easy to conquer, subdue, and plunder this rich, unlucky land. It was an alluring, precious, and easy prize. Drawn by India's riches and beauty, and encouraged by prospects of easy victory, invader after invader came, and went back laden with untold booty.

The Panjab was the first Indian province in the invaders' way. It was a sort of door-mat at India's gate. It was here that the invaders set foot first of all. Just imagine the sort and extent of havoc and destruction that a pack of hungry wolves will cause to the first flock of sheep that comes across their way. Something very similar happened to the Panjab and Panjabis. They suffered far more than any other at the invaders' hands. Its rich lands were laid waste. Its villages, towns, and cities were looted and burnt. Its inhabitants

were massacred most mercilessly. Its women were dishonoured, raped, and enslaved.

But the Panjabis went through all this hell and havoc of suffering as mute, helpless, impotent victims. They never thought of offering united opposition or resistance to the foreign invaders. They could not unite to face such common dangers. They had no leader to inspire and prepare them for such joint endeavour for common good.

(2)

As said above, the invaders had come mainly from the north-west. Since the beginning of the eleventh century, the invaders were all Muhammedans. Some of them came merely for plunder. They did here what the earlier invaders had done. But they did it all with greater brutalities and worse savage cruelties; for they considered themselves to be soldiers of Islam, whose religious duty it was to loot, dishonour, and massacre the 'infidels'. The rich lands of the Panjab were laid waste. Its villages, towns, and cities were looted and destroyed. Its inhabitants were massacred most mercilessly. Its women were dishonoured, raped, and enslaved. These Muhammedan invaders did something more not done, known, or suffered before. They carried away thousands of its men, women, and children to their own country. There they sold them as slaves.

Another set of these Muhammedan invaders came not merely as invaders, but as crusaders as well. Of course, they wanted to do what other invaders had

done. But they were sworn to do something more as well. They wanted to force their religion on the conquered people. They were determined to convert or kill the 'infidels'. These invaders founded kingdoms. They began to rule over the land in accordance with the law of Islam as understood by them or as interpreted to them by their *qazis* or theologians.

The Panjab, of course, was the first to be conquered by these invaders-cum-crusaders. It lay between two powerful Muhammedan capitals, Delhi and Kabul. The foreign Muhammedan government was most firmly and thoroughly established here. The Muhammedan invaders' conversion campaign had been more vigorous, ruthless, and successful in the Panjab than anywhere else. Consequently, by the end of the fifteenth century, which saw the advent of Guru Nanak Dev, more than half of the Panjab's population had been converted to Islam. The Panjab, therefore, contained the largest number of converts. These converts were even more aggressive and more bigoted than the foreign crusaders. They oppressed their Hindu neighbours out of their new-born zeal for their newly adopted religion. The Hindus tried all arts to please their Muhammedan rulers and neighbours. They imitated them in various ways. They adopted their language, dress, and way of life. Consequently, those who had escaped conversion had lost almost all that lends dignity and grace to the life of a Hindu.

The Panjabi Muhammedans had a dual loyalty—one towards their Panjabi neighbours, who were mostly

Hindus, and the other, towards their foreign co-religionists, who formed the ruling class. The latter loyalty was the stronger one. They felt to be closer to their foreign co-religionists than to their Hindu fellow-Panjabis. The Hindu and Muhammedan masses, of course, lived side by side in all parts of the Panjab. But they had no sense or feeling of mutual affinity or neighbourliness, no consciousness of their interests being common. There was constant friction between them in which the Muhammedans were the aggressors, and the Hindus were the victims of aggression.

(3)

Such was the state of things in the Panjab when Guru Nanak made his debut there towards the end of the fifteenth century. He preached a new philosophy, a new way of life. He sought to totally transform the people's outlook and attitude towards life, society, and the world. He exhorted them to realize that the God of the Muhammedans and the Hindus was one and the same God; that human beings were His children and, hence, members of one family. He tried to plant, in the hearts of the Muhammedans and Hindus, love and regard for each other, so that they could learn to live together in peace and amity. He said to them, 'True religion can never preach, teach or countenance hate and animosity between man and man. Let all Muslims be true Muslims. Let all Hindus be true Hindus. Let everyone of them act upon the basic principles of his religion. If all do so, they cannot hate or despise or persecute anybody. God is love. The path of hatred cannot lead to the Abode of Love.'

He wanted the people to realize that all who lived in the Panjab were one people, Panjabis; that they did not become aliens or enemies by a mere change of, or a difference in, religion. He wanted them to realize that their interests were common. He aroused in them a strong sentiment of Panjabi nationalism. By precept and example, he toiled all his life to unite the people into one brotherhood. He set the example by taking a low-caste Muhammedan as his constant companion. He visited the Hindus' temples and the Muslims' mosques. In his religious gatherings, men and women of all castes, creeds, and ranks sat together as members of one brotherhood, partaking of the food of the spirit being served there. He preached to them in their own language or mother-tongue. He made Panjabi the language of prayer. Till then, the Muhammedans had used only Arabic, and the Hindus had used Sanskrit alone, as their languages of prayer. He taught Panjabis to pray in Panjabi. This also engendered a feeling of oneness, of being Panjabis.

Again, in the community kitchens, run by Guru Nanak and his devotees, Hindus and Muslims, high castes and low-castes and social outcastes, touchables and untouchables, all sat together, to partake of the food for the body served there free and freely to all. This made them feel that they were one people.

In this way, they learnt a new lesson, that of co-existence, of unity amidst diversity. They came to realize that, though having different religious beliefs and rites, they were Panjabis all the same.

Thus Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was also the founder of Panjabi nationalism. The sapling planted by him was watered, nourished, and shielded by his successors.

When Guru Arjan Dev, the fifth Guru Nanak, decided to build the house of God—Hari Mandar—at Amritsar, he invited a prominent Muslim divine of Lahore, Hazrat Mian Mir, to lay its foundation stone. In the anthology of sacred writings—the Granth Sahib—compiled by him side by side with the compositions of the Sikh Gurus, he included the works of both Muhammedan and Hindu saints. This was a great step towards making the people realize their oneness and common destiny.

Guru Arjan Dev was marvellously successful in bringing the two communities together. Both Hindus and Muhammedans in large numbers accepted his faith. This enraged Emperor Jahangir, who did not like that Muhammedans be drawn away to another religion. He ordered that Guru Arjan be arrested and 'killed with tortures.' His orders were carried out most mercilessly as has been already told in Book II.

Guru Har Gobind, the sixth Guru Nanak, raised an army to protect the infant community and to set it on the path which was to lead to its ultimate destiny and destination. But he did not ignore or give up the secular legacy inherited by him. He continued to water, shield, and nourish the sapling of Panjabi nationalism, which Guru Nanak had planted in the Panjabis' hearts. He recruited his soldiers without any distinction of

creed or community. He had a large number of Muhammedans among his trusted soldiers and friends. He built mosques for them. They enjoyed full freedom of worship and prayer. Thus they were practising the art of co-existence, of maintaining unity amidst diversity.

Guru Har Gobind had to fight three defensive battles against Mughal armies. His Muslim soldiers fought zealously against their co-religionists. That was a practical demonstration of their having imbibed the spirit of the Sikh Gurus' teachings.

When some time later, Jahangir, the murderer of Guru Har Gobind's father, offered him his hand of friendship, he accepted it quite readily. He did so because he would not miss any chance or opportunity of weeding out enmity and hatred, and fostering love and amity among all.

(4)

Acting most vigorously on Jahangir's religious policy, Aurangzeb ordered the execution of Guru Tegh Bahadur. Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Teg Bahadur's son and successor, continued to follow his predecessors' policy of love and friendship for all and hate or enmity for none. He did not let the Sikh movement become anti-Islamic or anti-Muslim. He continued to lay emphasis on the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God. He had a large number of Muslim admirers, followers, and friends. He had a large number of Muhammedan soldiers in his army. They never showed even the slightest hesitation in fighting his battles against their co-religionists. They came to his help in all crises, and never left him in the lurch.

He continued to act as the friend of man and all tyrants' foe. He continued to water, shield, and nourish the sapling of Panjabi nationalism planted in the Panjabis' heart by Guru Nanak. He toiled all his life to forge a united front against the fanatic foreign oppressors, and to make the land equally safe for the followers of all faiths and creeds.

Though he was called away before he could see his high aims duly accomplished, yet his labours were not lost. Though he did not actually break the chains which bound his nation, yet he had set his countrymen's soul free and filled their hearts with a lofty longing for freedom and ascendancy. He had destroyed the awe and terror, inspired by the Muslims' tyranny. He had shown that the Mughal armies could be opposed and defeated. He had taken up tiny sparrows and had taught them to hunt down the mighty imperial hawks. He taught his Sikhs to regard themselves as the chosen of the Lord. He assured them that they were destined to crush tyranny and oppression. He taught them to look upon themselves as the future rulers of their land. He assured them "*Raj Karega Khalsa, aaki rahe na koe.*"

The Sikhs had become a distinct and separate community. They had their own script, scripture, traditions, aspirations, and places of worship and gathering. Spurred on by their Guru's inspiring teachings and example, they continued to resist and fight the Mughal tyranny. They became the spearhead of a resistance movement against the fanatic foreign Mughals' tyrannical rule. For many years after the death of Guru

Gobind Singh, a strong storm of religious hate and intolerance blew across the Panjab. The two main communities of the Panjab were actually at daggers drawn at each other. Yet the spark of nationalism, that had been lit by Guru Nanak and fed and shaded by his successors, was not extinguished.

The armed struggle against the Muslims' tyranny, initiated and actively conducted by Guru Gobind Singh, was carried on by his followers. The first success won by Sikh arms occurred in 1709 A.D. With an army of untrained and ill-equipped Panjabi peasants, Baba Banda Singh Bahadur defeated the well-trained, well-equipped, and far stronger Mughal armies. He occupied a large portion of the eastern Panjab. He became the first Sikh ruler with his own capital, fort, and coin. He upheld and followed his Gurus' secular policy. All sections of the people got equal justice and protection. They felt that they were being ruled by sons of their own soil or land, and not by foreigners, as theretofore.

But his success was short lived. He was martyred in Delhi in 1716 A.D. Still, he virtually succeeded in destroying the Muslim ruling class. What is worth remembering is, that though he fought against the tyrannical Muslim rulers and was treated by them with ferocious cruelty, yet he entertained no hate against the Muslims as such. His last words, when his flesh was being torn with red-hot pincers, were—'God sent me to punish the corrupt and wicked people who had strayed away from the path of equity and were committing all kinds of excesses. Now that the said

task has been done. He has given power to men like my tormentors here to put an end to my life. I am being recalled by Him who sent me hither. All happens as He wills it to happen. I have no regrets. I bow to His will.'

(6)

The fall of Baba Banda Singh and the destruction of his army was followed by a period of ruthless repression of the Sikhs. The Mughal governors of the Panjab boasted that they would destroy and finish off the Sikhs. Thousands over thousands of them were murdered most mercilessly. Prices were fixed on their heads. The governor of the Panjab made massacre of the Sikhs a pastime. In the words of a Muslim writer, the governor 'filled the plain of the Panjab with blood as if it had been a dish'.

For a time, the Sikhs disappeared as a political force from the Panjab. They fled to the hills, jungles, and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. For eight years (from 1716 to 1724 A.D.), the Sikhs suffered silently. They took no active, effective step against their persecutors. But then they began to make their appearance again in the plains of the Panjab. They organised themselves in small bands and began, once more, to harass the government by their plundering expeditions and gorilla war-fare. They punished the traitors who had betrayed their brethren to the government. They also punished the petty tyrants who had, like mean cowards, vented their wrath on their unprotected women and children. They also

punished such corrupt officials and zamindars as oppressed the people. In particular, they fell upon and looted government parties carrying government treasure. They inflicted defeats on the Mughal armies sent against them from Lahore. Indeed, they made it very hot for the government of the Panjab and its supporters. It has to be remembered that all their activities were directed against the Mughal authorities. The people in general were not touched. They were even helped against their corrupt officials and powerful, troublesome neighbours. This made them popular with the people—Hindus as well as Muhammedans. The people began to look upon the Sikhs as brother-Panjabis, to whom they could look up for effective help in times of trouble and need.

This story of persecution, on the one side, and revenge, on the other, went on for some years. By then the government felt tired of this method of dealing with the Sikhs. It decided to try the method of conciliation or placation. They were given a handsome jagir and the title of 'Nawab' was conferred on their leader Kapur Singh. This was in 1733 A.D.

There was thus a sort of peace between the government and the Sikhs. The latter utilized this time for strengthening their organization. In 1734 they re-organized their forces into (i) the *Buddha Dal*, the Army of Elders, and (ii) the *Taruna Dal*, the Army of the Young. Both the Dals were supervised and kept together by Nawab Kapur Singh, who was highly respected, both as a secular and a spiritual leader. This reorganization helped them to carry on their struggle

against the cruel fanatic Mughal tyrants with greater effect and success. They organized fresh campaigns. They spread themselves into the Bari Doab and went up to Hansi and Hissar.

The government stopped the jagir. It began once more to persecute the Sikhs. The Temple of Amritsar was taken into possession. Moving columns were sent round to capture and kill the Sikhs. It was made criminal for anyone to give shelter to Sikhs or to help them in any way.

Thousands and thousands were killed in this way. There were also a number of cold-blooded executions so memorable that they entered the Sikhs' daily prayer. One such was the martyrdom of Bhai Mani Singh, the most learned and respected leader of the time. This occurred in 1738 A.D.

As a result of these renewed persecutions, most of the Sikhs again left the plains, and sought shelter in the Shivalik hills, the Lakhi jungle, and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. But, on occasions, they would come out of their hiding places and make their presence felt. One such occasion was Nadir Shah's invasion of India.

Nadir Shah invaded India in 1739. To reach Delhi he passed through the Panjab. He laid waste the whole countryside. He plundered Delhi. There he massacred in cold blood over one lakh men, women, and children. On his return journey he rounded up thousands of men and women, Hindus as well as Muslims. He meant to carry them off as slaves. The Sikhs came to know of this. They came out of their

hide-outs and fell upon the rear of Nadir's Army. They carried away a good part of the booty which he had got by plundering Delhi. They also released a large number of their countrymen from Nadir's captivity. Their conduct during Nadir Shah's invasion made them very popular with the Panjabi people. Even the Muslim peasantry of the Panjab began once again to look upon them as their friends and brother Panjabis. On reaching Lahore, Nadir Shah questioned the Governor, Zakriya Khan, about the 'mischief-makers' who had dared to attack his army's rear. He was told, 'They are a group of *fakirs* who visit their Guru's tank twice a year, and, bathing in it, disappear.' 'Where do they live?' asked Nadir Shah. 'Their homes are their saddles', he was told. Thereupon, Nadir Shah said, 'Take care, the day is not distant when these rebels will take possession of your country.'

This remark of the foreign invader hinted at Zakriya Khan's incapacity to deal with the Sikhs. It cut him to the quick. He decided to launch an all-out campaign against them.

Fresh and stricter orders were issued to local officials to finish off the Sikhs. Prices were again fixed on their heads. Rewards were offered for their capture and destruction. The whole machinery of the government was put into motion to crush them. Even the non-official *zimindars* were made to lend a hand in this genocidal campaign.

This relentless, all out campaign against the Sikhs went on for about eight years. Most of the Sikhs again took shelter in the hills, jungles, and the sandy deserts of Rajputana. During this period occurred

the martyrdoms of some of the noblest, holiest, and most revered Sikh leaders, like Bhai Mehtab Singh, Bhai Taru Singh, Baba Bota Singh, Sardar Subeg Singh, and Sardar Shahbaz Singh. During this period occurred also the whole-sale massacre of the Sikhs in cold blood called the *Chhota Ghalughara*, the first or lesser holocaust. More than ten thousand Sikhs—men, women, and children—were killed.

All these executions and massacres set ablaze the fire of vengeance in the Sikhs' hearts. They longed for an opportunity to avenge the blood of the martyrs on their merciless persecutors, and to destroy and root out the oppressors of their race.

This opportunity was offered to them by the invasions of Ahmad Shah Durrani (or Abdali). The first of his nine invasions occurred in 1748. His invasions disorganized the administrative machinery of the Panjab. This gave the Sikhs a chance to come out of their hide-outs. It was during the period of these invasions that the Sikhs rose to power. Each time the Durrani came, they retreated into the jungles, hills and deserts. But as soon as he turned back homewards, they fell upon him and harassed and harried him all the way up to the Indus. They took away most of the loot he was carrying home. They also released the thousands of men and women whom he was carrying off as slaves. He did his worst to finish off the Sikhs. In what is called *Waddha Ghalughara* or the Great Holocaust, he killed ten to twelve thousand Sikh warriors and eighteen to twenty thousand Sikh women and children. But all this destruction failed to curb,

demoralize or suppress the Sikhs. They continued their struggles with still greater zeal and vigour.

This brave conduct of the Sikhs endeared them to the people. All sections of the people began, once more, to look upon them as their champions and protectors. Thus Ahmad Shah's invasions forced the Panjabis to sink their religious differences, and to regard themselves as Panjabis rather than as mere Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs.

(7)

By organizing resistance against the Durrani invader, the Sikhs were able to seize power. In 1748 Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia was chosen the supreme commander of the Dal Khalsa. The Dal Khalsa was, at the same time, re-organized and declared to be a state. It was divided into eleven misals* each with its own leader. All of them were to be under the over-all command of the supreme commander. The misals occupied more and more territory. Lahore was occupied in 1765. They divided most of the Panjab among themselves. They also developed a system called *Rakhi*. They undertook to defend the people in their respective zones on payment of protection tax called *Rakhi*. In due course the misaldars became petty barons, and their misals became their private armies.

Of the eleven misals four deserve notice. The most powerful were the Bhangis. They were in possession

*There was also the twelfth misal called the Phulkia. But it was not a part of the *Dal Khalsa* and did not participate in their struggle against the Durrani or the Mughals. Its story is hence outside the scope of this book,

of Lahore, Amritsar, and most of the Western Panjab. The next in importance were the Kanhayas who held the Himalayan foothills. The Ahluwalias were master of the land between the Ravi and the Beas. The Sukarchakias were among the lesser important misals. They were in possession of only the town of Gujranwala and the neighbouring villages.

The system of misals was a make-shift arrangement. It was suited to the challenge of the foreign invasions. But it did not provide a well organised or efficient administration of the Panjab as a whole. The Khalsa had, no doubt, become the paramount power in the Panjab. Yet it was far from being a consolidated power. The province was divided into as many as eleven independent states under Sikh rulers. The only bond of union among them was a common faith and common danger. They presented a solid front to the enemy. Otherwise they were quite independent of one another. They were, often, mutually at war. Their possessions were constantly changing. This state of things was not conducive to real peace and prosperity of the province. If the Panjab was to survive and prosper as a province, it was essential that it should be united and made strong. This could be done if one of the misals could subdue and absorb the others. The contest for supremacy was between the above said four misals.

So, the need of the time was a strong and wise misaldar who could subdue the other misals and absorb them into his own. Such a one appeared in the person of Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia. Of him we shall read in the following pages.

A VALIANT WOMAN-WARRIOR

(1)

Guru Gobind Singh brought about a wonderful revolution in the life, spirit, and outlook of his people. For centuries they had been held in subjection by autocratic alien rulers. He aroused the dormant energies of the vanquished people. He filled them with a living spirit, a lofty and zestful longing for social freedom and national supremacy. He fired them with courage and self-confidence, with aspirations to throw off the foreigners' yoke, to be masters of their own destinies, and rulers of their land.

With his Amrit or Baptismal Nectar, he turned frail bodied and feeble-hearted weaklings into strong-bodied and lion-hearted heroes and warriors. He turned, as he spiritedly declared, jackals into lions and tigers. He made tiny sparrows fight and vanquish mighty hawks. With a pat on the back and a deep look in the eyes, he could send out a fat, flabby, big-bellied sadhu, armed with only a wooden club, to challenge and break the skull of an experienced, well-armed, and mighty Pathan general. Indeed, a single 'Singh' (lion) of his

could, with dauntless courage and unshakable self-confidence, face and fight one and a quarter lakh adversaries to die fighting, but never to flee from the field. Such was the healthy wonderful change effected by Guru Gobind Singh in the bodies, hearts, and minds of his people.

This wonder-working process was not confined to menfolk alone. Guru Gobind Singh's Amrit of the two-edged sword wrought a similar revolution among the womenfolk as well. He raised women to a position of equality with men. This equality operated, not only in the social, religious, and political spheres, but on the battle-field as well. There are numerous examples of Sikh women's displaying what is commonly known as manly courage, strength, and bravery. In an earlier book we read of the heroic, manly deeds of Bibi Dip Kaur and Mai Bhago. Here we shall learn about another brave manly Sikh woman-warrior.

Her name was Sada Kaur. She was a matchless, valiant woman-warrior. She was, however, something more than that. She was also a wise and able administrator, endowed with admirable qualities of statesmanship. In war she could wield weapons and lead armies on the battle-field, and make plans for successful campaigns. She could also ably manage and wisely advise on all affairs of state in times of peace. She occupies a prominent position among the Sikh heroes. Nay, she is worthy to be counted among the topmost woman-heroes of India.

She played an important and effective role in battles fought for liberating our land from cruel, fanatic,

foreign rulers' grip, and in driving away invaders. With her active soldierly help in battle, she enabled Maharaja Ranjit Singh to drive out the Afghan rulers from the Panjab. With her wise advice and guidance, she helped him to bring about unity in the Panth and the Panjab. In that way, she helped him to establish Panjabis' joint rule in the land of five rivers. For her active and effective support in his early conquests, she has been called 'the ladder by which Ranjit Singh climbed in his early years'.

(2)

Sada Kaur was born in 1762, the year of the *Waddha Ghalughara* or the Great Holocaust. Her father was a famous, fearless warrior. From her early childhood she showed clear signs of being endowed with her warlike forefathers' spirit and powers of mind and body. Her parents were quick to notice these traits of her character and constitution. Her father said to her mother, 'Our Sada Kaur promises to be a Bibi Dip Kaur, a Mai Bhago. Let us give her good, suitable training. Let us help her to become a woman warrior.'

No sooner said than done. She began to be trained as a soldier. She turned out to be a wonderfully quick learner. In quite a short time, she mastered the soldierly arts of riding and wielding weapons of war. In hand-to-hand mock-contests with her fellow-trainees, she was always at the top. Nobody could make her acknowledge defeat. All who watched her engaged in these soldierly feats and exercises, used to remark, "There you see an Amazon in the making, a budding

valiant woman-warrior. She is sure to make history, to make a mark in the history of this land.'

In due course, Sada Kaur was married to Gurbakhsh Singh Kanhaya. He was the only son of Jai Singh Kanhaya. The latter was the most powerful misal-dar at the time. Gurbakhsh Singh was about three years senior to Sada Kaur in age. He was well-built, tall, strong, brave and handsome. He was well versed in all skills and arts of war. He excelled specially in riding and swordsmanship. He was very popular with his soldiers. As his father had grown old and weak, Gurbakhsh Singh handled all affairs of the Kanhaya misal. In the event of any battle or conflict, he used to lead the misal's army.

(3)

In 1784, when Gurbakhsh Singh was about twenty five, the Kanhaya misal was attacked by the combined forces of Mahan Singh Sukarchakia, Jassa Singh Ramgarhia, and Sansar Chand Katochia. Now, what was the cause of this attack ? Had the Kanhayas done anything to offend the three invaders ?

To answer these questions, we shall have to go back a little in history. As said already, in times of peace or when there was no common danger, the misaldars were prone to fight with one another. Each wanted to extend his territory and to acquire more wealth in form of booty.

The cause of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia's enmity with Jai Singh Kanhaya was this, In 1776 Jai Singh had, with

the help of the Bhangis, Ahluwalias, and Sukarchakias, attacked and defeated Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and taken possession of some of his territory. He had antagonized Sansar Chand Katochia by taking possession of the fort of Kangra.

Jai Singh had acted as a patron and helper of Mahan Singh Sukarchakia. The latter was a mere lad when his father, Charat Singh, had died. But in 1782, a quarrel occurred between the two, the patron and the protege. In 1781, the Kanhayas had helped raja Brij Lal of Jammu against the Bhangis. The raja had promised to pay to the Kanhayas thirty thousand rupees as yearly tribute. But later he refused to pay it. The Kanhayas decided to attack Jammu. They sought Mahan Singh's help. The latter reached Jammu before the Kanhayas could do so. The raja fled in terror. Mahan Singh plundered the rich city. Jai Singh wanted a share in the booty of Jammu. Mahan Singh refused to share it.

This, naturally, offended and incensed the old warrior. Mahan Singh was frightened. He hastened to Amritsar to tender his apologies to Jai Singh. But the latter refused to see him. He covered his face with his *chadar*, as he lay in his bed, and refused to exchange a word with Mahan Singh. Mahan Singh was on the point of being taken prisoner. But he got a timely warning and fled from Amritsar. Then he began to plan measures to take revenge upon his proud old patron. He found ready allies in Jassa Singh Ramgarhia and Sansar Chand Katochia. The three combined their forces and attacked the Kanhayas in 1784.

Gurbakhsh Singh led out his army to meet the combined attack. A fierce, bloody battle was fought at Achal Batala, near Gurdaspur. The fight was very unequal, indeed—three against one. Gurbakhsh Singh fought like a lion. He was ever in the thick of the fight, cheering, encouraging and guiding his soldiers. He wielded his sword most effectively, cutting down all who came in his way.

The unequal bloody fight raged on in great fury from early morn till mid-day. Neither side was prepared to yield or acknowledge defeat. Hundreds were killed and wounded on both sides. Still, the bloody, unequal fight raged in unabated fury. Then something happened which brought the battle to an abrupt end. A fast-flying arrow came hissing and struck Gurbakhsh Singh in the chest. He fell down and died instantly. His death caused deep grief even in the hearts of his attackers. The leaderless Kanhaya army left the field. The victors did not chase the vanquished.

This defeat and the death of his son broke Jai Singh's heart. He saw no alternative but to make peace with his enemies. He surrendered Kot Kangra to Sansar Chand. He restored the old possessions of Jassa Singh Ramgarhia. In order to win the goodwill of Mahan Singh, he did something which will be told in due course.

A Kanhaya soldier came galloping to convey the tragic, heart-breaking news to Sada Kaur. Naturally enough, the news stunned her. But she soon mastered

her grief. She checked her fast-flowing, silent tears. She regained composure and self-control. She got up and said to the messenger, 'Brother, lend me your horse.' He readily got down and handed over the reins to her. Springing on to its back, she spurred it, and galloped off.

Riding at full gallop, she soon came to the spot where her lord lay in a pool of his own blood. Some soldiers were sitting beside their dead leader. At her approach, they stood up and withdrew to a little distance. She was thus left alone with her darling, departed lord's lifeless body. Her composure and self-control were instantly gone. With a loud, piercing, heart-rending cry, she fell on his body, covered his face with kisses, and cried, 'Wake up dear Sardarji ! Open your eyes, my darling. See, your servant, Sada Kaur, has come. O dear, open your lips. Talk to me, though even for a little, little while. Recount to me your valiant deeds of today. Bid me farewell before you depart on your long journey to your true, permanent home. Speak. O dear, speak. Don't be sulky. Have compassion on me ! Give me some parting message, some sane, sagacious advice. What are your orders for me ? What shall I say to venerable Sardarji, our aged, ailing father ? He is eagerly awaiting news from the battle-field. Ah me, what news he will get ! It will break his heart. And your little 'Moonie, your Mehtab, orphaned in her infancy ! What shall I tell her ? How shall I console her ? How shall I quiet her when she cries and calls for her papa ? O my dear, why don't you speak ? You are driving me mad, lord of my body and soul.'

But there was no response, no reply. Who was there to make any? Her lord had, hours ago, flown to the world to which all have to go, and from which none ever returns.

She woke to the reality. She controlled herself. She mastered her grief, which was to be her life-long companion. She dried her tears. She steeled her heart. She collected her thought. She resigned herself to the will of the All-powerful Giver and Taker of Life. She repeated to herself Guru Arjan Dev's sacred words.

'Whatever Thou doest, O Lord, Is all sweet to me.' Then, she got up and stood looking intently at her dead warrior's face. Then, closing her eyes, and folding her hands, she prayed to God to grant to the departed soul lasting peace, bliss and a seat at His feet. 'O Gracious Father!' she added, 'grant me the strength of heart and mind to accept Thy Will with patience and fortitude. Grant me the capacity and power to carry on my Sardarji's work. So enlighten me, O Giver of Light and Wisdom, that I may be able to carry on his work in the manner in which he himself would have done. Enable me, O Guru and God, to realize his abruptly broken dreams, so that, looking from above, he may feel pleased with me. Help me, O protector of the helpless, be ever with me in weal and woe!'

Then she knelt down beside her husband's body. Gently and carefully, she removed his armour. She then donned it herself with care. She took up his trusty sword stained with his enemies' blood. She

wiped it clean, put it in its sheath, and girded it herself. She applied a little of his clotted blood to her forehead. She then turned her *dopatta* into a light turban and tied it on her head. Thus dressed and armed like a male-warrior, she was now really an Amazon or female warrior in male attire. She had undergone a sea-change, a thorough transformation. She resolved to take up her dear departed husband's place as the leader of the Kanhaya misal. She was then only twenty-two years old.

RANJIT SINGH— BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

(1)

Most Muslim rulers and officials of those days had one ugly and lamentable failing. They were bigoted and cruel despots, given to base and debasing pastimes and pleasures. To oppress their non-Muslim subjects and neighbours was considered by them to be their right as rulers, and their duty as followers of the Prophet of Islam. Their treatment of the people, as a whole, was despotic, oppressive, and cruel.

Pir Muhammed Khan Chattha, head of the Chattha tribe living along the Jehlam, and chief of Rasulnagar, was no exception. Like other Muslim rulers, he was cruel and bigoted. He treated his subjects, specially the Hindus, with utmost cruelty. No woman's honour was safe in his territory. Life and property were equally unsafe under him. His agents and subordinates vied with one another in exhibiting their daring and power in maltreating the people.

Complaints against the Chatthas' excesses and atrocities reached Mahan Singh Sukarchakia. He was pained to hear these pity-exciting complaints. The

Sikh in him was filled, through and through, with righteous indignation. His ire was aroused to the utmost. He said to himself, 'As a Sikh of Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh, it is my bounden duty to punish the wicked evil-doers, and to rescue the victims of the Chatthas' brutality.'

He consulted his friends and associates. They all concurred with him. They expressed their readiness to risk their lives in this noble adventure. Preparations for the campaign were begun at once. In due course he set off towards Rasulnagar with an army of six thousand horsemen. All of them were determined to win or die, but never to fly. Pir Muhammad Khan Chattha and his associates heard of Mahan Singh's coming attack. They turned out to be no better than cowards. They lacked the guts to come out in the field. They shut themselves in the fort. Mahan Singh besieged the fort and the city. After a few months' struggle, the fort and the city were conquered. They became Mahan Singh's possessions. The Chatthas were adequately punished.

Mahan Singh assured the people that he would treat them with justice and kindness. 'We are all Panjabis', he said, 'You will soon see the welcome difference between the rule of the deposed foreigners and that of the incoming fellow-Panjabis'. His proclamation was greeted with joyous shouts of Sat Sri Akal and welcome.

Soon thereafter, Mahan Singh conquered Alipur, another stronghold of the cruel, hated Chatthas. There, too, he was welcomed as a deliverer. In fact,

this campaign brought him much popularity, honour, and fame.

Rasulnagar was renamed Ram Nagar and Alipur was renamed Akal Garh.

After his victories against the Chatthas, Mahan Singh started homewards. Soon a despatch-rider arrived from Gujranwala. Jumping down from his horse, he bowed and said to Mahan Singh, 'Millions of congratulations, Sukarchakia Sardarji ! God has blessed you with a son. He has been named Budh Singh, after your great ancestor.'

On hearing the good news, Mahan Singh called a halt. Joyous cries of Sat Sri Akal were raised by the whole victorious army. Mahan Singh thanked God and said, 'The two boons—a great victory and a son—have been granted to me at the same time. The new born comes as a bringer of victory. He shall be called Ranjit Singh—Victor of Battles. I am sure more victories will come to me. He, too, will be a great victor. He will win many battles.'

(2)

So Ranjit Singh, Victor of Battles, was born in Gujranwala on November 2, 1780. He was the only son of Mahan Singh Sukarchakia. His mother's name was Raj Kaur. During his early childhood he had a virulent attack of small-pox. He survived the attack; but it deprived him of his left eye and deeply pitted his otherwise handsome face. He was thus somewhat disfigured. No one, not even the wildest day-dreamer, could have then dreamt that this frail, disfigured child was destined to be a great man ; that he

would, one day, become master of the Panjab and of the Panjabis' hearts; that he would inspire terror in the hearts of those terrible people who had been so often invading, plundering, and laying waste this rich and beautiful land of five rivers; that he would be universally acclaimed as the Lion of the Panjab.

Mahan Singh made due arrangements for his only son's education and training. He knew quite well the nature of the task which the child would have to undertake in the years to come. He wanted to prepare him for that task. A learned, pious Sikh, named Bhai Bhag Singh, was chosen to be his teacher. He was to teach him Gurmukhi, to impart him instructions in the principles of the Sikh faith, and to acquaint him with the history of the Panjab and the Sikhs. The teacher did his task very well, indeed. As a result of his instructions, Ranjit Singh developed deep and abiding reverence for the Sikh Gurus and their teachings. He acquired the habit of beginning his day with prayers before Guru Granth Sahib and hearing recitations therefrom. He was imbued with the spirit of Panjabi nationalism, which had been founded by Guru Nanak, fostered by his nine successors, and exemplified in life by the great Sikh heroes. Even at that early age, he began to cherish a longing to be a friend and helper of Panjabis, to toil, and even die, if need be for the Panjab.

His military training was entrusted to a capable Sikh scholar-soldier, named Pandit Amir Singh. He trained him in the art of using weapons of offence and defence, particularly in wielding the sword. He would usually take him out into the neighbouring jungle and

engage him in riding and hunting. As much of his time was spent in chase, he learned to ride and shoot well. He became an excellent horseman and unmatched swordsman. In fact, later on, he came to be probably the best rider and swordsman of his time in India. Even at that early age he became a tireless rider. He could remain the whole day in the saddle, without showing any signs of fatigue. He exhibited this quality many a time in later life. Indeed, he needed it and used it quite often. For example, when he heard of General Hari Singh Nalwa's death in action at Peshawar, he hastened to that place on horse back. He rode in one day from Lahore to Jehlam, a distance of over one hundred and sixty kilometres.

His excellence as a swordsman was also exhibited by him a number of times. For example, when he met the British Governor General, Bentinck, at Ropar in 1831, he personally competed with the best of the English horsemen in tent-pegging and swordsmanship. None could equal him. All acknowledged his superiority. He exhibited also a rare feat of his skill as a swordsman. A trooper of his held a lemon on his outstretched palm. Ranjit Singh came riding at full gallop, and, cut with his sword, the lemon without injuring the trooper. No one else was able to perform this feat.

He had to make use of his skill many a time on the battle-field. With a swift stroke of his sword, he would sever the head of his adversary and make it roll in dust. All this was a result of the excellent training that he received in his early days.

IV

THE BLOOD IN HIS VEINS

(1)

From his very early life Ranjit Singh had an insatiable hunger for information and knowledge. He asked all sorts of questions from his teachers and others whom he met.

One day he said to his teacher, Bhai Bhag Singh, 'You have told me much about our Gurus, their teachings, their activities, and so on. You have given me a good deal of inspiring information about the great Sikh martyrs and the sublime manner in which they bore unheard of, unbearable tortures, and resolutely refused to give up their faith. I have learnt much about the great heroes of our race, like Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, Nawab Kapur Singh, and Sardar Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. But I have yet to hear about my own immediate ancestors, whose blood runs in my veins. Do please enlighten me about them. Will you, dear Bhaiji ?'

Bhai Bhag Singh : 'Most readily and gladly, my dear. I am delighted to hear what you have said. Well, listen. As, of course, you know, your family is called

the Sukarchakia family, and your father is now the head of the Sukarchakia Misal...'

Ranjit Singh : 'Why are we called Sukarchakias ? How did we acquire that name ? We live in Gujranwala and should be called Gujranwalias, I deem.'

Bhai Bhag Singh : 'I shall tell you that presently. Your ancestors were humble peasants living in villages around Gujranwala. One of those villages was named Sukarchak. How your family came to be named after that village will be told later.'

'Well, as I said, your ancestors were humble peasants. They were sturdy, strong, and industrious workers. They earned a meagre living as farmers and raisers of cattle. The first in your family to win prominence was one named Sardar Budh Singh...'

Ranjit Singh : 'How ? What did he do to achieve prominence ?'

Bhag Singh : 'I shall tell you that presently. Sardar Budh Singh was your father's grandfather, that is, your great grandfather. He had the honour and privilege of having been baptized by Guru Gobind Singh himself...'

Ranjit Singh : 'How lucky he was ! What would not I give to drink the Amrit from the tenth Master's own hands ! But go on.'

Bhag Singh : 'He heard from the Guru's own lips what qualities of mind and heart his saint-soldiers, the

Khalsa, should possess ; how they should live and act as friends of man and all tyrants' foes.'

Ranjit Singh : 'That means that he explained the Khalsa Rehat or rules of conduct for his Khalsa. You have told me so well and so often what the Rules are. But O to have heard them from the Guru's own lips ! But please go on.'

Bhag Singh : 'Well, Sardar Budh Singh did follow the Rehat prescribed by Guru Gobind Singh. He was a deeply religious man, possessing lofty qualities of head and heart. He was also a strong, brave, and fearless warrior. He fought with his face ever towards his foes. He never showed his back to his enemies. He had on his body as many as forty scars of sabre, lance, and musket wounds.'

Ranjit Singh : 'Grand indeed ! What a glorious record ! I would emulate him.'

Bhag Singh : 'Please don't interrupt. Let me complete the story.'

Ranjit Singh : 'All right. I shall keep my lips sealed, my ears open and my mind alert. Go on, I am all ears.'

Bhag Singh : 'Sardar Budh Singh had a strong, swift-limbed, and beautiful piebald mare named Desan. It became as well-known as its rider. Their feats of endurance became the talk of the people far and near. They travelled the plains of the Panjab and swam its broad rivers in flood as many as fifty times.

Being inseparable, they—the mare and its master—came to be known jointly as Desan Budh Singh. Sardar Budh Singh died in 1718, two years after Baba Banda Singh's martyrdom. It is believed that he took a worthy part in some of Baba Banda Singh's battles. He left his sons a few villages which they could call their own, and many others in the neighbourhood which paid them protection tax or Rakhi.'

Ranjit Singh : 'Let this suffice for today. I have heard a good deal on which I would ponder before hearing more.'

Bhag Singh : 'All right, as you like.'

(2)

The following day the teacher and his knowledge-hungry pupil met again. The former continued his story of Ranjit Singh's ancestors as under :

'As I said, one of the villages inhabited by your ancestors was Sukarchak, Sardar Budh Singh's son, Sardar Naudh Singh, fortified that village. He engaged a body of Sikh horsemen to help him in his adventures. Together they came to be called the Sukarchakias. They formed the Sukarchakia Misal. With this small band of warriors, Sardar Naudh Singh performed such noble and daring deeds that he came to be known and respected throughout the land, from the river Satluj to Rawalpindi. The Sukarchakias joined forces with other misals and fought several engagements with Ahmad Shah Abdali. Sardar Naudh Singh was able to win the regard and approbation of

Nawab Kapur Singh, under whom he fought against the invader. As the Abdali retreated, the Sukarchakias took possession of parts of the land lying between the Ravi and the Jehlam. Sardar Naudh Singh was killed in 1752, while fighting against the Afghans near Majitha, near Amritsar.

Ranjit Singh : 'When I grow up, I shall avenge his death. I shall wreak vengeance on these damned foreigners.'

Bhag Singh : 'That is a mighty good resolve ! May God grant you the strength to act up to it ! You will be rendering a great and memorable service to your country and countrymen. But let me go on with my story.'

'To resume the story, your grandfather, Sardar Charat Singh, was the eldest of Sardar Naudh Singh's four sons. He became the head of the Sukarchakia family. He added to the number of his horsemen and, thereby, added to his strength. He made it a rule that all who would join his misal, must first get baptized.'

Ranjit Singh : 'A good rule, no doubt. I, too, shall adopt it.'

Bhag Singh : 'That will be fine, indeed, and proper. Sardar Chet Singh then moved his headquarters from the village Sukarchak to Gujranwala. He erected battlements round the town. At that time he heard that the Imperial Faujdar of Eminabad was very cruel and fanatic ; that he mercilessly oppressed and maltreated the people, particularly the Sikhs and Hindus. Sardar Charat Singh decided to punish the wicked evil-doer, and to rescue his victims. With a body of one

hundred and fifty of his select horsemen, he raided Eminabad. He besieged the Faujdar's palace. He killed the cruel official in a hand-to-hand fight.'

Ranjit Singh : 'I am proud of his noble undertaking and his great soldierly feat. Well, go on !'

Bhag Singh : 'Your grandfather plundered the Faujdar's treasury and the imperial arsenal. He acquired large funds and hundreds of good horses. This adventure won him much fame and popularity.'

'The Afghan Governor of Lahore heard of all these doings of Sardar Charat Singh. He came with a force to apprehend the brave Sukarchakia Sardar. But he was compelled by your grandfather to fly back to the capital. He left behind him his guns and stores of grain, to be appropriated by your sire, of course.'

Ranjit Singh : 'So my grandfather killed two birds with one stone. He routed the attacker and got ample rewards therefor. He got victory and wealth.'

Bhag Singh : 'Yes. But let me finish. Emboldened by this success, Sardar Charat Singh extended his domains by capturing the towns of Wazirabad, Ahmedabad, and Rohtas. Soon thereafter, Ahmad Shah Abdali once again came down from Afghanistan. Sardar Charat Singh adopted the usual tactics employed by the Sikhs in those days. He retreated to the jungles. Ahmad Shah plundered his estates. He also got Gujranwala's fortifications razed to the ground. Soon, however, Sardar Charat Singh more than settled his account with the Afghans. He chased them on their return journey and plundered their baggage. He

also freed a large number of women and girls who were being carried away as slaves. He rebuilt the battlements round Gujranwala and reoccupied the neighbouring country. He rehabilitated those who had been plundered and uprooted by the Afghans.

‘Sardar Charat Singh’s last action was at Jammu. He went there to help the rightful claimant to the *gaddi* (throne) of Jammu. There he fell mortally wounded by the bursting of his own matchlock or gun. That was in 1782.’

Ranjit Singh : ‘That was, indeed, a very sad end of that mighty hero.’

Bhag Singh : ‘True, but God’s ways are strange and inscrutable. We have to bow before His Will. So did your father. But we shall talk about him tomorrow, if you please.’

Ranjit Singh : ‘All right. I have heard much today.’

(3)

On the following day, Bhai Bhag Singh continued his recital as under :

‘Well, dear, your father was only ten when your grandfather breathed his last. He inherited his father’s daring and ambition. He married a daughter of Sardar Gajpat Singh, Chief of Jind. Thereby he strengthened his own position among the misaldars. He built a fort within the walled town of Gujranwala. He named it “Garhi Mahan Singh”. He increased the number of his horsemen to six thousand.

Thus strengthened, he resumed the ancestral occupation of capturing territory and extending his domain.

‘Soon complaints began to reach your father against the Afghan Governor of Rasulnagar, Pir Muhammad Khan. The latter was cruel, haughty, and bigoted. He oppressed and maltreated his subjects most mercilessly. Your father responded to the appeals of the oppressed people. He fell upon Rasulnagar and conquered it without much difficulty. He renamed it Ramnagar. Then he conquered Alipur, which was another stronghold of the haughty and much hated Chatthas. He renamed it Akal Garh.

‘Now I come to a most important event in your family’s history. Do you know, can you guess, what it was ? No. I shall tell you. It was your birth. You were born when your father had gone westwards to chastise the Chatthas. You were named Budh Singh. A despatch rider was sent post-haste to inform your father. He was just returning from his victories against the Chatthas, when the despatch rider met him. Of course, not only your father, but also all his companions were filled with joy. Your father was told that you had been named Budh Singh. He said, “The boy is a bringer of victories. He shall be called Ranjit Singh—Lion Victor of Battles. He will win many victories and great renown.”

‘That is how you got your name, my dear Lion Victor of Battles !’

Ranjit Singh : ‘God permitting, I shall justify my father’s choice of my name. I shall try to act in

a manner as to prove his prophetic words to be true to the letter.'

Bhag Singh : 'After taking and renaming the Chattha strongholds of Rasulnagar and Alipur, your father took Pindi Bhattian, Sahiwal, Isakhel and Sialkot. Then he proceeded to Jammu. He had an old score to settle with its Hindu Dogra ruler. The latter fled from the city. With the loot of Jammu, your father raised the Sukarchakias from a position of comparative obscurity to that of being one of the leading misals.

'This angered Sardar Jai Singh Kanhaya. The Kanhayas were then the most powerful of the misals. Your father had to fight them. In one of the many battles between them and us, Sardar Jai Singh's son, Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh, was killed. The Kanhaya Chief's pride was humbled. At the suggestion of Sardarni Sada Kaur, Sardar Gurbakhsh Singh's widow, he agreed to betroth his grand-daughter to you, our precious dear Lion Victor of Battles ! Two powerful misals have been united thereby. The union is sure to produce good results.

'This brings the story of your brave illustrious ancestors to the present day. You now know as much as you need to know about those noble ones whose blood runs in your veins.'

Ranjit Singh : 'You have told the story well. I am grateful for it. I am sure God will permit me to follow their example. I have many ideas and dreams about what I would do. May God be my guide and helper !'

Bhag Singh : 'I join you in that prayer. May He permit me to witness your glorious achievements !'

BOLD ADVENTURES OF A LAD

(1)

In 1791 Mahan Singh called up Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat to pay the tribute due from him. On his refusal to comply, Mahan Singh decided to proceed to Gujrat for the purpose of realizing the tribute. Ranjit Singh, who was then a little over ten years of age, heard of his father's decision. He made up his mind to accompany his father in that campaign. So determined, he met and said to his father, 'Dear father, I should like very much to go with you on this military campaign. Do please allow me to do so. I am eager to see and learn how such campaigns are conducted. I must get used to the demands that such campaigns make on one's body, mind and heart. I want so to equip myself that I may be fit to be helpful to you. I long to get initiated in the art of war as early as possible. Shall I go with you?'

Mahan Singh said in reply, 'I like your idea, my Lion Victor of Battles. I agree with you that it is time for you to get experienced in military campaigns. Who knows how soon you may be suddenly called upon to step into my shoes. It is best to get prepared in time for all eventualities. You will go with me. Get ready. Choose the horse that you will ride. Select a band of

best horsemen who will attend upon you as your body-guard.'

Ranjit Singh was beside himself with joy. He thanked his father and said, 'When do we start?'

Mahan Singh, 'As you know, an *akhandpath*, continuous reading of Guru Granth Sahib, has been started this morning. On its completion, we shall offer prayers to the Giver of all victories for success of our campaign. We shall start the next day, which is Wednesday.'

Mahan Singh started towards Gujrat as planned. Ranjit Singh accompanied him, riding his favourite horse, and followed by his bodyguard. He was going to have his first experience of a military campaign. Little did he know that he was accompanying his father not only for the first but also for the last time.

Sahib Singh Bhangi could not stand Mahan Singh's mighty force. He left Gujrat and took refuge in the fort of Sodhran. At the same time, he sent an urgent appeal to his kinsmen at Lahore. He appealed to them to come to his help against the Sukarchakias.

Mahan Singh besieged the fort. The siege dragged on through the winter months. Now, as ill luck would have it, Mahan Singh was suddenly taken very ill. He had a severe attack of dysentery. The attack was so severe that he feared that he might not recover. Hence he formally invested Ranjit Singh as the head of the Sukarchakia misal. He did this by daubing the boy's forehead with saffron paste. Then

he exhorted his followers to obey their young chief and be ever faithful to him. Bidding farewell to his son and followers, Mahan Singh returned to Gujranwala, for rest and treatment.

The Bhangi Sardars of Lahore soon learnt of Mahan Singh's illness and return from the siege. They also learnt that the Sukarchakias were in a precarious predicament. They were under the command of a lad of ten or eleven. They felt confident that 'the lad of ten', as they called Ranjit Singh, would not be able to withstand them. They boastfully declared, 'We shall despatch the lad or bring him to Lahore, bound hand and foot. We shall crush and finish off the Sukarchakias and be masters of their lands.'

They hurried to the relief of Sodhran. Ranjit Singh soon learnt that a Bhangi force from Lahore was on its way to the besieged fort. Though a lad of less than eleven, he acted like a seasoned general. He went out to waylay and meet that force. Ambushing in the jungle near Kot Maharaja, he waited for the Bhangis from Lahore. They were to pass that way. As they approached, Ranjit Singh fell upon them suddenly. They were taken completely by surprise. They were soon routed and put to flight. They left behind a large number of guns and cannon, besides a good deal of other war-materials. All this fell into Ranjit Singh's hands. He sent all this to Gujranwala.

Needless to say that Mahan Singh was immensely pleased to see the guns, cannon, and other war-materials captured by his son. He was glad to hear that his 'Lion Victor of Battles' had proved a victor

in the very first battle that he had fought. This, he thought, augured well for the future.

But on the following day, Mahan Singh breathed his last. The sad event occurred in March 1792. Ranjit Singh heard the sad, heart-breaking news while at Kot Maharaja. Weighed down with sorrow, he hurried to Gujranwala. He was just able to get back in time for his father's funeral.

(2)

Ranjit Singh was a lad of less than eleven when his father died. He was too young to bother about the day-to-day management of his estate. That work was left to his father's manager, Lakhpat Rai. His mother, Raj Kaur, and his mother-in-law to be, Sada Kaur, jointly supervised and guided Lakhpat Rai in managing the affairs of the Sukarchakias' estate.

Ranjit Singh spent much of his time in chase. Engaged in that pastime, he had ample practice in riding and shooting. Thus he learnt to ride and shoot well. In these years he also developed a love for horses. This love, in later life, turned into a master passion.

As already said, his favourite pastime was hunting. One day, while hunting in the thick forest near Ramnagar, he rode off alone in pursuit of game. On that account, he got separated from his companions. He, a lad hardly yet in his teens, was thus all alone in that dense forest.

It so happened that a Chattha chief named Hashmat Khan, was also hunting in the same forest.

Now, this Chattha chief had suffered many humiliating defeats at the hands of Ranjit Singh's father. His estate had been taken possession of by that Sukarchakia Sardar. He met with Ranjit Singh in that jungle. He decided to take revenge. He was confident that he would kill that 'lad of thirteen'. So determined, he fell upon Ranjit Singh. He made a sharp, sudden cut with his sword. Just when he did so, Ranjit Singh's horse took fright and reared. Thereby Hashmat Khan's first move failed. Before he could make a second move, Ranjit Singh pierced and transfixed him with his lance. He then cut off Hashmat Khan's head, impaled it on his spear, and rode back to his companions with that gory trophy.

His companions hailed him with joyous shouts of Sat Sri Akal, praised his power and daring, congratulated him on his wonderful bold achievement, but gently protested against his having risked his life in that manner. They ended by saying, 'In future we shall never leave you thus alone. If that villain had succeeded, what would have been our fate ? How would it have gone with our misal, what answer could we have made to the two venerable Sardarnis' rebukes and questions ?'

(3)

Ranjit Singh spent another two years hunting wild pig and deer in the dense jungle around Gujranwala. He took no interest in his estate. His mother became anxious for his future. She felt that marriage might bring him round to the responsibilities of life. She conferred with Sada Kaur. The two ladies fixed a date

for his marriage. He was just over fifteen when he left Gujranwala for Batala, the chief town of the Kanhayas, to wed Sada Kaur's daughter, Mehtab Kaur. This alliance between the two important Sikh families was a major event for the Panjab. All the leading Sikh chiefs were present at the wedding, which took place in 1796 A.D.

TOWARDS A FREE AND POWERFUL PANJAB

(1)

DANGERS

In the 1790s the condition of the Panjab was far from happy and secure. A greater part of it was ruled by the Sikh misals. The misaldars were generally at daggers drawn with one another. The misal organization was, in fact, no longer the united fraternity that it used to be some fifty years before. When Ahmad Shah Abdali had begun his invasions of India, the Sikh misals had fought as one under Jassa Singh Ahluwalia. But now they were woefully disunited. This disunity of the Sikhs rendered the Panjab weak and vulnerable. An invader from the north-west could have easily defeated the misals, one by one, and made the Panjab a part of his empire. If the Panjab was to be made free and powerful, this problem of disunity of the Sikhs had to be solved before it became too late.

Ranjit Singh was shrewd enough to realize the gravity and urgency of this problem. He was alive to the dangers to which this state of things exposed his

dear Panjab, the land of the Sikh Gurus and of the innumerable Sikh martyrs. It was clear to him that the misals must need be brought together under one strong and capable person. He felt that, God willing, he could be the needed one. He decided to work towards achieving that goal.

But there was also another menace to the Panjab. There were some aliens, non-Panjabis, in the very heart of the Panjab, who wanted to take advantage of this disunity. There was the ruling Pathan family of Kasur. These Pathans had not become Panjabis at heart. Their loyalties were more to the land of their ancestors than to the Panjab. The rise of the Sikh misals had filled them with fears about their own safety. They felt that the rising Sikh power was a mortal menace to them. Each time that Ahmad Shah Abdali or his son, Taimur, had invaded India, the Pathans of Kasur had joined him in plundering their own neighbours. They wished, therefore, that the Afghans should invade the Panjab and make it a part of their empire. Their Chief, Nizamuddin Khan, hoped that by helping the invaders, he could secure *Subedari* (Governorship) of Lahore.

So, a still bigger menace to a free and powerful Panjab were the Afghans. Ever since the conquests of Ahmad Shah Abdali, the Afghans had looked upon northern India as a part of their empire. Abdali's attempts to treat and use it as a part of his empire had been largely foiled and frustrated by the Sikhs. His son and successor, Taimur, had kept up pretensions to northern India. But the best that he could do was to retain his hold on Kashmir and turn out the Bhangis from Multan. Taimur's son, Shah

Zaman, was full of inordinate ambition. As soon as he succeeded his father, he announced his intention of re-establishing the Afghan empire in India. Among the first to offer him all assistance and full cooperation was Nizamuddin of Kasur.

(2)

TO FIGHT OR FLY ?

Shah Zaman soon proved as good as his word. He invaded India in 1793. In this first invasion he came as far as Hassan Abdal and then went back. In 1795 he came again. This time he re-took Hassan Abdal and captured Rohtas from the Sukarchakias. Ranjit Singh was thus the first Sikh Chief to suffer at Shah Zaman's hands.

The invader had, however, to hasten home in order to save his own country from an invasion from the west. As soon as he turned his back, Ranjit Singh expelled the Afghans from Rohtas.

Shah Zaman had not abandoned his ambitious intention. He came for the third time in November, 1796. He intended, as before, to proceed to Delhi. He had a well-equipped army of over thirty thousand Afghans. He expected that a large number of Indians would join him. Among them was to be Nizamuddin of Kasur, who had been promised *Subedari* of Lahore. Shah Zaman also expected that Sahib Singh of Patiala would help him, in keeping with his family's tradition of loyalty to the Durrani.

As the news of Shah Zaman's invasion spread, people began to flee to the hills for safety. Most of the misaldars were among the first to decamp. By

December, 1796, Shah Zaman had occupied the Panjab as far as the Jehlam. He was, of course, heading for Lahore. The territories of two Sikh Chiefs, namely Sahib Singh Bhangi at Gujrat and Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia, lay across the invader's route to Lahore. The former made an attempt to halt the invaders. But the odds against him were too heavy. The invaders were too many and too strongly armed for him and his horsemen. He had to give up the attempt and fly eastwards.

Ranjit Singh's turn was to come next. He could raise, at the most, five thousand undisciplined horsemen, armed with only musket and spears. The Afghans, on the other hand were over thirty thousand strong. They were equipped with heavy artillery and swivelguns mounted on camels. Evidently, the odds were too heavy against Ranjit Singh and his ill-equipped five thousand horsemen. Under the circumstances, he felt it would be suicidal for him to meet the invaders, all by himself.

He saw it clearly that if the Afghans were to be checked, the Sikhs had to unite and face the invaders as one force. Otherwise, they would be annihilated piecemeal, one by one. So, concerted action was necessary. In order to come to a joint decision, Ranjit Singh decided to call a meeting of all the Sikh Chiefs or *Sarbat Khalsa* at Amritsar. That was the traditional Sikh way of meeting a common danger. So determined, he collected his family, and proceeded to Amritsar.

In compliance with the summons of the *Sarbat Khalsa*, many Sikh Chiefs assembled at Amritsar,

The matter was discussed and debated upon. Most of the chiefs were in favour of abandoning the plains and going into the hills for the time being. It was added, 'Let us advise and assist the people to do the same. No doubt, the Afghans will plunder our cities and towns. Let them. We shall settle accounts with them later. We shall harass them continually with our traditional hit-and-run tactics. We shall thus make it too hot for them. They shall be forced to go back. We can follow them in order to see them off in our traditional way.'

The elderly Sahib Singh Bhangi was the chief spokesman for this point of view. He had had an experience of the military might of the invaders. He pleaded that it would be impossible for them to fight and defeat the Afghans in pitched battles, Guerilla tactics, he added, would be more effective. Most of those present agreed with him.

(3)

SADA KAUR'S BOLD STAND

The celebrated woman-warrior, Sada Kaur, was present in that meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa*. She was there as the Chief of the Kanhaya misal. She was strongly opposed to this point of view. She had given vent to her feelings by uttering words of protests, now and then. When she saw that most of the Sikh Chiefs were inclined to show the white feather, she was deeply hurt and bitterly sad. She went up to her son-in-law, Ranjit Singh, and said to him, 'Do you see which way the wind blows here? It is a matter of shame for us all to run away in this cowardly manner.'

Remember the great heroes of our race. Their souls as well as the souls of our immediate heroic ancestors must be feeling sad and humiliated at our cowardice being manifested here. Let us not sully their names. Let us fight the invaders with all our might and wisdom, leaving the outcome in the hands of the Almighty. We should trust in Him and do the right. I want you not to fly but to stay behind and fight. I shall be with you. What have you to say to this, my Lion Victor of Battles? I hope you will not forget what blood runs in your veins. Speak up, dear !'

Sada Kaur's words went straight to the brave young heart of Ranjit Singh, and stirred it to its utmost depths. He stood up and thus addressed the assembly, 'Brave Khalsa warriors, let us not be overcome by fear and despair. This brave respected lady by my side has shown me the right way, the right way for all of us. It is, no doubt, hard and beset with dangers, very great dangers. But what dangers can make Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa swerve from the path of honour and glory? Let us not forget what lessons he taught us, and what spirit he infused in us. When creating the Khalsa, he declared that a single Sikh of his would boldly and fearlessly face and fight one and a quarter lakh and never show his back to the enemy. He declared that he would make humble little sparrows chase and pluck mighty hawks. Shall we prove unworthy of the Guru's trust? Shall we run away from the invaders, without giving them a taste of our steel? The tenth Master will turn his back on us, if we do so. Don't forget what treatment our brave ancestors, not long ago, gave to this invader's father and grandfather. Let us follow their example, come

what may. I for one, weak and ill-equipped though I be, shall stay and fight, unmindful of the consequences. I, too, was wavering and slipping like most of you here, but this brave respected lady has saved and propped me. I thank her. All of you should thank her. She has saved me from going wrong. She wants to save you all from behaving in a manner unworthy of you. Wake up, Khalsaji. Let us unitedly face the invaders. The wonderful Lord's is the Khalsa, and His the victory shall be.'

Sada Kaur's and Ranjit Singh's stand turned the majority in their favour. They all agreed to back up Ranjit Singh. They chose him the commander of the Khalsa forces. They all, including some grey-headed veterans of many battles, agreed to follow and obey this bold young man, who was hardly sixteen years of age, at that time.

So Ranjit Singh took command of the combined Sikh forces. At their head, he advanced towards Lahore. It had been occupied by Shah Zaman on January 1, 1797. The advancing Sikh forces drove the Afghans and their Indian supporters out of the countryside. They, later, took shelter in the city. Every night the Sikhs would attack some quarter of the city. After killing a number of Afghans, they would disappear into the darkness. The Afghans dared not come out and pursue the Sikhs. In fact, they were ever full of fear and alarm, and longed to go back home. Shah Zaman was disillusioned and in despair. He began to look for a face-saving excuse for giving up the campaign and going back to his country.

That excuse he got at the end of January 1797. He heard that his brother, Mahmud, was organizing a rebellion in Afghanistan. He started homewards at once. He left General Shahanchi Khan with twelve thousand soldiers in Lahore. The Sikhs followed the retreating Shah all the way across the Jehlam, and relieved him of much of his baggage.

As the Sikhs were returning after having seen off Shah Zaman and his Afghans, Shahanchi Khan decided to take them by surprise and deal them a crushing blow. He fell upon them suddenly near Ramnagar. But he was speedily and completely defeated by the Khalsa forces led by Ranjit Singh.

Till then Ranjit Singh had been an obscure Sikh chieftain. But in that winter he came to be known as the hero of the Panjab.

(4)

SADA KAUR ROARS AGAIN

Shah Zaman heard of his general Shahanchi Khan's defeat at Ramnagar. He felt humiliated. This sense of humiliation aroused his anger. He vowed vengeance against the Sikhs. As soon as he had settled his domestic problem, he once more started towards India. This was his fourth invasion. It occurred in the autumn of 1798.

As the news of the invasion spread, the people of the Panjab, mostly Hindus and Sikhs, began to leave their homes and seek safety in far off places. Most of them fled to the mountains. Indeed, there was panic in the whole Panjab. By October, 1798, all the big

cities of the Panjab were deserted. The Sikhs' sacred city of Amritsar was no exception. Even the sacred shrine there was left with only a handful of guards to protect it. Sahib Singh Bhangi evacuated Gujrat. The Afghans plundered the town and massacred its inhabitants. As the Hindus and Sikhs had left the city earlier, the victims were all Panjabi Muslims. The latter had hoped that the invaders, being their co-religionists, would do them no harm. Likewise Gujranwala was evacuated by Ranjit Singh. The town and its inhabitants, mostly Muslims, met the same fate.

Again a meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa* was called at Amritsar to decide what course of action should be adopted. Again, the majority of those present were for flying to the hills. They felt that the odds against them were too heavy, for regular pitched battles. They again advocated employment of their traditional hit-and-run tactics in order to harass and tire out the Afghans.

Again it was Sada Kaur, the lion-hearted woman-warrior, who spiritedly opposed the majority's talk of 'too heavy odds and the traditional hit-and-run tactics'. She said, 'Khalsaji, you are again for adopting a course of action most unworthy of you. All these specious arguments are mere excuses. They are dictated by cowardice which has gripped your hearts. They are intended to camouflage your chicken-heartedness and lack of honour. As Guru Gobind Singh's Khalsa, it behoves you to dare and bear all dangers, and challenges, boldly and fearlessly, unmindful of what the outcome might be. To fly would be the height of timidity and lack of confidence in the Guru, God, and yourselves. Moreover, honour bids you to stay and

fight the invaders. You have been taking protection tax or rakhi from the people. You are honour-bound to protect them. To run away, leaving the people to the invaders' mercies, would be most dishonourable for you, my dear Khalsaji.

'If all of you decide to show the white feather and run away, I will not join or follow you. I will stay to brave all dangers. I am sure that a large number of the Guru's Sikhs will be ready to join me. I will lead them against the foreign invaders. Guru Gobind Singh's *Amrit* impels me to follow that course. I appeal to you, in the name of Guru Gobind Singh, in the name of our glorious heroes and martyrs and in the name of your brave ancestors to shake off all fear and weakness. Let us face and defeat the invaders. The Guru and God will be with us !'

At this Ranjit Singh stood up and said, 'I completely concur with the lion-hearted Kanhaya Sardarni ! She has been a source of inspiration to me. She has instilled in me her own indomitable spirit. I feel proud of being related to her. I appeal to you all not to dishonour the Khalsa's name. I appeal to you all to realize your duty towards this sacred city and the sacred shrine here. Shall we leave this Holy of Holies to the tender mercies of the merciless, fanatic, foreign invaders ? Shall we forget what this invader's grandfather did to our sacred places here ? And shall we give this Afghan a free chance to repeat Ahmed Shah's performance ? Shall we run away from our duty ? Take courage, Khalsaji. Remember how we hesitated, how we doubted our God-given powers two years ago. Then think of what our united action could achieve. What we could do then, we shall do now, too,

‘I, for one, will stay and, with the help of such of my brethren as agree to cast their lots with me, fight the invaders, and protect the sacred city and shrine to my last breath.’

At this stage, Ranjit Singh’s uncle, Dal Singh, stood up and said, ‘Believe me, dear Khalsaji, the Afghans are not so good and formidable soldiers as they are taken to be. I say this from a little bit of experience. An armed Afghan caravan was carrying loads of fruit for Shah Zaman. I came to know of this. I made up my mind to have that fruit for myself. With only a handful of my brave companions, I fell upon the caravan, scattered them and took away the fruit as well as a lot of other useful materials. Shake off all fear. We can fight, affright and put to flight the foreign invaders. The Guru and God will help us.’

This decided the Sardars and their friends. ‘We stay and fight,’ said they. ‘Victory is the gift of God. Let us make a united effort to oppose and drive away the haughty Afghans.’

Ranjit Singh was again chosen to be the leader. He was just eighteen years of age at that time.

(5)

SHAH ZAMAN IN A FIX

Shah Zaman entered Lahore on November 27, 1798. Soon thereafter, he sent a strong detachment of select Afghan soldiers to attack Amritsar. Ranjit Singh was ready to receive them. He came eight kilometres out of the city to meet them. A severe battle ensued. It lasted over three hours. The Afghans were routed. They

fled to Lahore. Ranjit Singh pursued the flying foreigners to the very gates of that city. Then he encircled the capital. He cut off the Afghans' supply-lines. He burnt the crops in the countryside around Lahore. The Afghans began to suffer for want of supplies.

The situation became very serious for them. They felt that unless they drove away the Sikhs, they would face want and starvation. So, they were forced to take the offensive. A stronger and bigger detachment of select Afghan soldiers under Nizamuddin of Kasur, was sent against the Sikhs. They attacked the latter at Shahdara on the other side of the Ravi near Lahore. The Sikhs proved too strong for the Afghans. They repulsed and routed the invaders. The Afghans suffered a heavy slaughter.

Another detachment of Afghans came from Lahore to help Nizamuddin. But by the time they could reach, the Sikhs had disappeared. The Afghans wreaked vengeance for their defeat by attacking and plundering the local population which was entirely Muslim. The Sikhs had not molested them in any way whatsoever. But the foreign co-religionists of theirs did not show any sympathy or tenderness for them, their Panjabi co-religionists. Thus the Panjabi Muslims learnt a much-needed lesson. They realised that their co-Panjabi Sikh brethren were better worthy of their loyalty than their foreign co-religionists. This realization was a valuable step towards the making of a free, united and powerful Panjab.

The Afghans were in great terror. They dared not move out of the city to face the Sikhs in an open battlefield. This made Ranjit Singh more daring. One day,

accompanied by a small band of horsemen, he rode up to the Samman Burj of the Lahore fort. Shah Zaman was holding court there. Ranjit Singh fired a number of shots which killed some Afghans waiting upon the Shah. Then he shouted out, at the top of his voice, 'O grandson of Ahmad Shah, Charat Singh's grandson has come. Come out, and measure swords with him.'

Shah Zaman heard the challenging shouts; but he dared not move. No Afghan had the courage to go out and meet Ranjit Singh and his small band of horsemen. After waiting for a short time, Ranjit Singh galloped away, shouting, 'Akal ! Akal !'

Shah Zaman was in a terrible fix. He had come with the intention of proceeding to Delhi. But he found himself confined in Lahore. It seemed impossible to pierce through the Sikh barricade and move on towards Delhi. He taunted his Afghan soldiers. He exhausted his eloquence in exhorting them to go out and boldly face and finish off the 'infidels'. But so great was the terror that Ranjit Singh and his companions had created in the Afghans' minds, that they merely shook their heads and refused to stir from their barracks.

(6)

SHAH ZAMAN'S DIPLOMACY

It was not long before Shah Zaman came to the disheartening, dismal conclusion that it was impossible for him to exterminate the Sikhs. His *jehad* or holy war against the 'infidels' was proving a failure. He decided to give up fighting against them. He decided to use diplomacy. Where the sword had failed, clever diplomacy might succeed. He concluded that if he could divide the Sikhs,

break up their unity, he would be able, one day, to liquidate them, one by one. He thought, 'If they could be persuaded to regard me as their overlord or emperor, even in name, I can count them among those subservient to me. I can then say that their estates are a part of my empire.'

So thinking, he sent his agents to Amritsar. They assured the Sikh Sardars that Shah Zaman had formed a very good opinion about them; that he had a great regard for them. 'He has decided', added they, 'to give up fighting against you. He wants to make friends with you. He says that he will not disturb your possessions. Keep what you have acquired. Give up fighting. Make peace. He wants to proceed to Delhi. He cannot do that so long as you are arrayed and up against him. So give up fighting. Tell us what you want. He will grant it, in order to win your goodwill and friendship.'

The Sikhs at once replied, 'We want nothing that the Shah can give us. All we want him to do is to return to his own country and leave us in peace in our own. Go and tell him that.'

The Shah's agents returned to Lahore. They informed him of their failure to rope in the Sikhs. But he was determined not to give up efforts at diplomacy. He said to his agents, 'Let us try another trick. Go and try to sow discord among the Sikh Sardars. Go to them, one by one. Make generous offers to every one of them, and hint that others are accepting the offers. With soft, sweet and clever words, persuade them to agree to my proposal. Ask them to send their agents to me in order to acquaint me with what they

want. Assure them, at the same time, that they will be given what they want. If we succeed in dividing these troublesome infidels, we can rule over them thereafter.'

This trick of his was more successful. Many Sardars were taken in. They sent their agents to Lahore. They were received with flattering attention and talked to in soft, honeyed words. Shah Zaman met each of them separately and said, 'Tell your master that I bestow on him the territory that he owns. He need pay me no tribute. Let him keep the land and use it as he likes. I shall not disturb him. I attach no conditions to this offer. He should not hesitate to accept it.'

So great was the Shah's success that even Ranjit Singh was persuaded to send his representative to the Shah. He was instructed to negotiate with him for the *Subedari* (Governorship) of Lahore.

The Afghan diplomacy was thus successful in breaking up the Sikh unity. Each Sardar was eager to acquire from the Afghan invader as much as possible. So the Shah's policy of 'divide and rule' was going to succeed.

The hour, they say, produces the man to tackle it. Just when the Shah was exulting over his diplomatic success, a saviour appeared in the person of Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. He was an elderly man of great learning and piety. He was also a brave and dauntless warrior. Moreover, he was a descendant of Guru Nanak. Because of all this, he was highly respected by all Sikhs. He enjoyed the status of 'father of the Sikhs'. He was deeply pained to see this discord among the Sikh Sardars. He felt that it would be ruinous for them, as

well as for the whole Sikh community. He pleaded with the Sardars to stop all negotiations with the foreign invader. He exhorted them to bear in mind what havoc Shah Zaman's father and grandfather had caused in the country, to their community, to their sacred places and to their ancestors. He concluded by saying, 'It will be a matter of lasting shame for us to beg for gifts and favours from the Afghans. Our ancestors spurned the offers made by the foreign invaders. They refused to accept Subedari of Lahore, when it was offered to them by Shah Zaman's grandfather, Ahmad Shah Abdali. Let us beware of the foreigner's tricks. Let us not be duped by him any further.

The Sikh Sardars agreed to be guided by Baba Sahib Singh Bedi. They said, 'You are authorized to speak on our behalf. Give to the Shah's agents whatever reply you like and think proper. We shall stand by what you say'.

Shah Zaman's agents came again to continue and conclude the negotiations. Every Sardar told them to meet and talk to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi, 'He will speak for us,' they said, 'We will accept what he agrees to accept.' The agents met the grand old man, stated their mission and urged him to advise the Sikhs to accept the Shah's generous offer.'

He replied, 'We took the country with the sword and with the sword shall we keep it. We need no gifts or grants from your master. The Khalsa will rule in their own right. Tell your master to clear off and leave us in peace. Or let him come out into the field and taste a bit more of our steel.'

The Shah was sorely disappointed at the failure of his diplomatic move. He gave up his plan to win over the Sikhs. He yelled out, 'So, they don't want peace. They want war. They shall have it. I shall soon teach them such a lesson in war as they will never forget. They will rue the day when they rejected my generous offer.'

But it was an empty boast, as we find from a news writer's report of the same day. It says, 'The Shah's camp is always in alarm on account of the Sikhs, who at night approach Lahore and keep a fire of musketry. None dares to go out against them.'

Shah Zaman now heard that his brother, Mahmud, was again stirring up trouble in Afghanistan. The news offered a good, face-saving excuse to the Shah for returning home. Before leaving, he proclaimed that, after settling matters with Mahmud, he would return, give the promised unforgettable lesson to the Sikhs, and conquer not the Panjab alone but the whole of India.

When the news of the Shah's departure reached Amritsar, the Sikh Sardars broke camp and hurried to their estates. But Ranjit Singh did something different. Instead of hurrying to his estate, he immediately set out in pursuit of the retreating invader. He caught up with the Afghan army's rear not far from Gujranwala. From there to the banks of the Jehlam, he kept up a running fight. He took a heavy toll of the invaders' life and equipment. This pursuit led him to the banks of the Indus.

All this made Ranjit Singh popular not only in the Panjab, but throughout India. He came to be regarded

as the protector of the Sikh nation and saviour of the Panjab. It was 'generally believed that were it not for the fortitude and excellent conduct of Ranjit Singh, the whole of the Panjab would have become a desert waste.'

Before leaving, Shah Zaman had threatened to come again as an invader and conqueror of India. He could not carry out that threat. He was deposed and blinded by his brother. In fact, his last invasion was the last invasion of India from the north-west. Thus the Panjab was cleared of the Afghans for ever. This was a very important step towards the making of a free and powerful Panjab.

AMBITIOUS,
CHARMING DREAMS

In due course, Ranjit Singh returned home, after having 'seen off' the invader Shah Zaman beyond the Indus. His mother and mother-in-law were waiting for him with pardonable pride and affectionate eagerness. As he came in, each moved round his head a bag full of gold mohars, kissed him on the forehead, and called to her attendant, 'Take this bag, go out, and distribute its content among the poor. Our Jewel, our Victor of Battles, has come home after winning name, fame and glory. Tell them all to pray for him. Let all pray that his star may rise higher and brighter, day by day.'

Thanks giving services were held in gurdwaras, temples and mosques. Gifts and food were given to the poor at large.

One day, Sada Kaur called him for confidential talk and said, 'My dear Ranjit, Lion Victor of Battles, I have been indulging in charming dreams and making ambitious plans about you and the Panjab. As you see, the misals are ever quarrelling among themselves,

In this way they weaken one another. We are thus a house divided against itself. Shah Zaman has been driven out, no doubt. But before leaving, he threatened to come again with a stronger force. We, too, should make ourselves stronger, lest he should prove too strong. Moreover, the misaldars' mutual quarrels cause intense suffering to the people. This sad and saddening state of things must end, it must be ended.'

Ranjit Singh—I agree with you fully and whole heartedly. But what should be done and by whom?

Sada Kaur—The first thing to be done is to unite the mutually hostile and warring misals under one leadership. By the way, we may leave out the Phulkias. They have, all along, held aloof and have even collaborated against the Khalsa Dal. If our misals get united, no foreigner dare attack us or win against us. Shah Zaman was taught the lesson of his life by our forces fighting under you, their matchless leader. We can likewise do the same to all our future foes from across the frontiers. Then we can, and shall, turn our attention to aliens holding parts of our Panjab and liquidate them, swiftly and completely.'

Ranjit Singh—Fine dreams they are, to be sure. The idea is good, grand, and noble. The scheme is splendid and charming. But how to achieve all this? How can the mutually jealous and ever-warring misaldars be persuaded to unite under one leadership? Will they agree to sacrifice their individual powers and independence at the altar of unity? And who is to be the leader?

Sada Kaur—Who but you, my dear Lion Victor of Battles? They chose you to lead the combined Khalsa forces against the Durrani. And you amply justified their choice, and proved your worthiness. That should make them inclined to entrust you with more powers, in peace as well as in war. I say with confidence that a high, very high destiny awaits you. Heights of glory and greatness are backoning you. Gird up your loins and get ready.

Ranjit Singh—Your dreams are charming, no doubt, but they are, all the same, mere dreams, wild, rather too wild, dreams. In your eagerness for me, you are forgetting the stern realities before us. Will the misaldars give up their identities, and hand over all their powers and possessions to me? I am very much in doubt about that. They will not readily accept me as their leader.

Sada Kaur—They did so on two recent occasions. They made you their leader to command their united forces against Shah Zaman. They agreed to be led and commanded by you. And you acquitted yourself most splendidly. They must do that again for the sake of the good of the community and the country.

Ranjit Singh—Surely they will do so, if Shah Zaman turns up again.

Sada Kaur—No, they shall do that much earlier and for good. They shall accept you as their leader, in peace and war, in order to make our community united and strong, and to make our Panjab free and powerful.

We shall appeal to them. Those who choose to ignore our appeal, shall have to taste and bow before our steel. They should be assured that by agreeing to our proposals, they would not be losers but gainers in the long run. We shall not liquidate the misaldars or their families. Their misals will go, no doubt, but they themselves will be well provided for.

Ranjit Singh—That is quite good and wise. They will act on the adage that says, 'If we feel that the whole is going to be lost, we should, of our own accord, part with half of it.'

Sada Kaur—Let us hope that they will realize that in time, and for their own sake, too. I have my plans for you and for our Panjab. I plan to make you the master of a great and liberated Panjab. I would see you become a maharaja, the Maharaja of the Panjab, whose name, fame and glory will live and shine in history, whose friendship and favour will be eagerly sought by rulers far and near.

Ranjit Singh—Splendid, very splendid dreams ! But go on.

Sada Kaur—I am serious. I am not dreaming but disclosing my plans. I want you to be the creator of a united, free, powerful, and prosperous Panjab. Let us plan, strive and achieve, heart within and God overhead. Victory and glory shall wait on our banners. We shall give peace, happiness and prosperity to the people. We shall show them how much better it is to be ruled by Panjabis in the Panjab than by foreigners. Isn't it a grand ideal, a noble task ?

Ranjit Singh—‘Yes, but perhaps too high to be achieved. I eagerly yearn to make my motherland forever free from foreign freebooters’ invasions. They come too often and too freely. They go about unchecked. They behave like wild beasts let loose on a flock of sheep. They spread panic and misery all round. They plunder and destroy our villages, towns and cities. They massacre the people. They carry away women and girls as their slaves. These Ghaznavis, Durranis, and their ilk must be made to give up doing such brutal and wicked deeds. They must be taught a bitter, unforgettable lesson. They have been visiting us too often. I should like to pay some return visits to their land in due time.

Sada Kaur—‘That is well thought and well put. Be sure you will do all that and more.’

Ranjit Singh—‘All the same, all this seems to be no better than a wild dream. In my ambitious and uncontrolled enthusiasm I start building castles in the air. I am getting too prone to day-dreaming.

Sada Kaur—‘There is nothing wrong or unworthy in building castles in the air. All castles are first built in the air. Only afterwards they are built on the earth. We have to begin with building castles in the air, and then end with castles on the earth. What is wrong and undesirable is to begin and end with castles in the air alone. We should and shall guard against that failing. Sure and complete success will be ours. Let us ever trust in God and do the right. All the same, we should not be proud, boastful, or overbearing. Let us

ever remember that sweetness and humility form the essence of all virtues and good qualities.'

Ranjit Singh—'I shall ever try to keep my behaviour modest and my projects high. May He be my guide and helper at all times and in all places !'

Sada Kaur—'Amin ! May He accept your prayer !'

LAHORE LIBERATED

(1)

CITIZENS' DECISION

Lahore had been liberated from the Afghans by the Sikhs in 1765. Three Bhangi Sardars—Lehna Singh, Gujjar Singh, and Sobha Singh—had captured it and divided it among themselves. At the time of Shah Zaman's last invasion, the city was in the possession of the above-said Sardars' sons, namely, Chet Singh, Sahib Singh and Mohar Singh. They paid little heed to the administration of the city or the welfare of its people. They were given to loose and luxurious living. Very often, they indulged in mutual quarrels. They used, quite often, to raid and plunder one another's parts of the city. These quarrels and raids of theirs brought much misery to the people in every part of the city. Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims, all suffered alike. 'The people of Lahore', says a contemporary writer, 'being extremely oppressed, raised their voices of wailing to the skies.'

The three Sardars' mutual hostility and quarrels made them weak and vulnerable. We have already heard of Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur. He had been casting

greedy, longing eyes on Lahore. On being promised *Subedari* of Lahore by Shah Zaman, he had joined his own forces with those of that foreign invader. He had fought against the Sikhs. But his plan had mis-carried. Shah Zaman had to go away without having achieved anything. Nizammudin was very sad and much disappointed. He had to be. All his dreams had been shattered, completely and too soon.

Now, when he heard of the state of affairs in Lahore, he decided to employ a trick in order to take the city. A majority of Lahore's population consisted of Muslims. He planned to arouse and fan the religious and communal sentiments of the Lahore Muslims and to persuade them to help him in taking the city. He sent his agents to the leading Muslims of Lahore. These agents appealed to them in the name of Islam and the Prophet. They said, 'He is a Muslim, he is your brother-in-faith. If you help him to acquire Lahore, you will rid yourselves of the *Kafirs*' (infidels') rule. You will help establish Islamic rule here. Invite him to come and take your city. Promise and render all help to your co-religionist, your brother-in-faith.'

But the Lahore Muslims refused to be taken in. They knew a great deal about Nizammudin's and his Pathan kinsmen's treatment of his subjects and neighbours. They knew that he and his tribesmen were as hard and cruel to the Muslims as to the non-Muslims. So they refused to oblige his agents. The latter had to go away to report to their master, the failure of their mission.

Soon after the departure of Nizammudin's agents, the leaders of the Lahore Muslims called a meeting of

prominent Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. There the chief leader of the Lahore Muslims described Nizammudin's clever move and said, 'It is true that he is a Muslim. But he is not to our taste. To be shoe-beaten by a Muslim is, in no way, more bearable or less abominable than being treated the same way by a non-Muslim. Moreover, whatever our ills and grievances—and they are real, hard, and many—we are much better off than those whose destinies he sways. I dare say that if that Pathan were to become our ruler, for us it would be like being flung from the frying pan into the blazing fire. So, we firmly and determinedly refused to countenance his agents.'

'But I fear that we have not yet heard the last of Nizammudin and his Pathan tribesmen. He knows a good deal of our three Sardars' mutual quarrels and animosities. He might decide to take advantage of their disunity and consequent weakness. He might attack and take the city by force. We must not let that happen. We have to decide what we should do to forestall him, to defeat his plans.'

'Please go on,' said a number of his listeners. 'You seem to have thought over the matter. Let us know your views.'

'Well', resumed the Muslim leader, 'in my view, we should get rid of our present oppressors, but we should also guard against our passing under another oppressor. In this matter of our common concern and interest, we should put aside all considerations of creed and caste, I have a proposal to make. But I hesitate to tell it. Some of my friends here might not like it.'

‘Do please tell us’, said a number of his listeners. ‘We shall consider and discuss it purely on its merits.’

‘Thank you’, said the Muslim leader. ‘I should like to add that I have discussed my plan with a number of friends—Sikhs, Hindus, and Musalmans. They have liked and approved it. Here it is. We all have heard very favourable reports about Sardar Ranjit Singh Sukarchakia. He is a good and kind ruler. If he were to agree to become our ruler, we should be very lucky indeed. I propose that we should send him a secret invitation, requesting him to come and occupy Lahore, and promising him our help and loyalty.’

All present—Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus—with one voice, approved the proposal. All agreed to appeal to Ranjit Singh to come to their rescue and deliverance.

(2)

CITIZENS’ JUBILATIONS

In accordance with the unanimous decision made in the meeting of the Lahore citizens, a letter was addressed to Ranjit Singh. It was signed by the topmost leader of each community. It was sent to him through special, trustworthy messengers. It was speedily delivered to him.

By nature, Ranjit Singh was cautious and sagacious in such matters. He was averse to acting in haste, without fully weighing the pros and cons. Therefore, before committing himself on this matter, or embarking on any action concerning it, he thought it prudent to make sure that the invitation was genuine. For

aught he knew, it might be some mischief-mongers' clever device to involve him in a conflict with the Bhangi Sardars.

Accordingly, he deputed a trusted servant of his, Abdur Rahman, to go with the citizens' envoys, study the state of affairs in the city, and advise him what to do. Abdur Rahman went to Lahore. He held talks with the leading Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh citizens of the city. Having studied the situation to his satisfaction, he returned to his master.

After despatching Abdur Rahman to study the situation at Lahore, Ranjit Singh had gone to consult with Sada Kaur at Batala. Abdur Rahman met him there and submitted his report. He assured Ranjit Singh that the invitation was genuine, that it expressed the true feelings of the Lahore citizens. 'Moreover', added he, 'of the three Lahore Sardars, only one, Sahib Singh, could have offered some effective resistance. He is away from the city. The other two are altogether incapable of offering any such resistance as may cause us any worry or difficulty.'

Ranjit Singh sought Sada Kaur's advice. She was much delighted. 'She said, So our dreams are on their way to realization ! You will be master of the Panjab's capital. Who controls the capital controls the country. Soon you will become master of the Panjab. We should accept the invitation and take immediate action. By helping them we shall be helping ourselves.'

Preparations were made for the attack. When all was ready, Sada Kaur said to her son-in-law, 'We shall

tell our soldiers not to do any harm whatsoever to the people or their property. Victorious armies, as you of course know, are wont to reward themselves by plundering the conquered city. In the process they inflict much suffering and shed much innocent blood. Our soldiers should do nothing of that sort. They should remember that we and they are going to Lahore not to conquer but to deliver. We are not to behave as enemies and conquerors but as friends and deliverers. We ourselves will give them ample rewards.'

Ranjit Singh was of the same view. He concurred with his mother-in-law, readily and wholeheartedly. Strict instructions were accordingly given to all the soldiers who were to take part in the coming campaign.

With an army of twenty-five thousand select soldiers, Ranjit Singh started towards Lahore on June 26, 1799. It was the worst part of the year for a military campaign in that part of the Panjab. The summer's heat was intense and scorching. The monsoons might break at any moment and convert the Panjab plains into a vast marsh. Perhaps, Ranjit Singh chose this time for the expedition for that very reason. He was sure that the Lahore Sardars had no thought that any attack could or would be made on their city in that hot scorching season. They would be caught napping, taken unawares and ill-prepared for offering any resistance.

Marching at leisure, Ranjit Singh's army reached near Lahore in the evening. During the night the entire city was encircled. By sunrise everyone of the twenty-five thousand soldiers was in his place and every

gun was in its position. Sada Kaur chose to attack the Delhi Gate. Ranjit Singh went to the Anarkali. There he was given a secret message of welcome from the citizens of Lahore. He rode round the city walls. He got it mined at several places. When a breach was blown in the wall, the leader of the Lahore Muslims caused a proclamation to be made by the beat of drum that he had taken the city's administration in his own hands. He ordered that all the gates of the city should be thrown open, so that the deliverers might enter the city.

Ranjit Singh entered the city through the Lohari Gate. Sada Kaur led in her horsemen through the Delhi Gate. Thousands of citizens standing on house tops, raised loud shouts of welcome to their deliverers and showered flowers on them.

Lahore was thus taken with very little bloodshed or loss of life.

(3)

AN ENEMY MADE A FRIEND

As Abdur Rahman had reported, Sahib Singh Bhangi was away from Lahore when the city was attacked and taken by Ranjit Singh. When Ranjit Singh's forces entered the city, Sahib Singh's family as well as Mohar Singh with his family and retainers fled through other gates. They were not chased and not molested in any way. However, Chet Singh shut himself in the fort.

Ranjit Singh had a mind to attack the fort. Guns were placed in position. But before firing had begun,

Sada Kaur advised him to hold back orders for the attack on the fort. She said to him, 'Let no shot be fired at the fort. We shall not waste any time and effort in forcing entry into the fort. Let Sardar Chet Singh remain in it as long as he likes. We need have no worry concerning him. Let us attend to other more important and urgent matters.'

Accordingly Ranjit Singh now addressed himself to the essential task of establishing peace and calm in the city. A proclamation was made assuring the people that they would not be molested in any way. 'We come,' it was announced, 'not as alien or hostile conquerors. We have come on your leaders' invitation. We come as your friends and deliverers. We shall do all we can to promote your welfare and to end all your troubles. Our soldiers have been warned that there is to be no *looting* and no molestation. If any one ignores the warning and indulges in *loot*, he shall be shot dead publicly. If any citizen has any complaint against any of our men, he should inform the nearest complaints-officer. It will be attended to at once and adequately.'

After entering Lahore, the first thing that Ranjit Singh did was to pay homage at important gurdwaras and offer prayers and thanks. His first public act thereafter, was to pay homage at the Royal Mosque (*Badshahi Masjid*) near the fort. Then he went to do the same at Wazir Khan's mosque.

He pitched his camp under the walls of the fort alongside the Royal Mosque. Deputations of leading citizens from each of three parts of the city waited upon him. They thanked him for his having delivered them from the Bhangi Sardars' misrule, offered him

their fullest loyalty, and expressed the hope that an era of peace and plenty would begin for Lahore and Lahoris. Ranjit Singh reassured them in every way.

As said above, Chet Singh had shut himself in the fort. Ranjit Singh had, in no way, disturbed him. Chet Singh did not take long to realize that yield he must, then why prolong the suspense and anxiety? He decided to deliver himself to the victor. The very next day, he sent his envoys to Ranjit Singh. The latter received them with courtesy and kindness. He asked them what their mission was. They said, 'Sardar Chet Singh sends his greetings to you. He says that he is ready to hand over the fort. All he prays for is that his life be spared. He will leave his all here for you.'

Sada Kaur was then by Ranjit Singh's side. She said to him, 'As I have often suggested, you should treat magnanimously all whom you subdue. Don't take away their all from them. Don't make them paupers. Don't earn their lasting enmity and hearty curses. Provide them handsomely, so that they may pass their lives comfortably and in peace. If you do that, your fallen adversaries will become your friends.'

Ranjit Singh accepted her advice. He said to Chet Singh's envoys, 'Go back and tell your master that no harm shall be done to him. He may take away all his belongings. He may depart in peace, at his pleasure.'

Soon Chet Singh came out of the fort, sad and crest-fallen. With bowed head, he approached Ranjit Singh. The latter rose from his seat and stepped forward to receive him. Then, in the presence of all,

he embraced his fallen adversary. Then he announced the grant to him of a handsome *jagir* for his life-time. Thus was a bitter enemy turned into a grateful friend.

The eighteen-year-old conqueror of Lahore entered the fort on July 7, 1799. Guns fired a royal salute. 'Trumpets of happiness were blown and kettledrums of victory were beaten in every direction.' There were hearty rejoicings everywhere in the city. The occupation of Lahore by Ranjit Singh marked the beginning of a just and peaceful government after decades of unrest, chaos and misrule.

MAHARAJA OF LAHORE

(1)

DISSIDENTS' CONSPIRACY

Before Ranjit Singh's debut on the political stage of the Panjab, Bhangis had been the most important of the Sikh misals. They were in possession of Lahore, Amritsar, and most of the Western Panjab. But by ejecting them from Lahore, Ranjit Singh had dealt them a big blow. Erosion of their position had started with their expulsion from that city. They could not—but feel perturbed and angry. It was but natural for them to plan and take vengeance on Ranjit Singh.

As said already at the time when Lahore was occupied by Ranjit Singh, Sahib Singh Bhangi, one of the three Sardars who had been in possession of the city was away. He was at Gujrat. When he heard of what had taken place at Lahore, he was upset and annoyed. He vowed vengeance against Ranjit Singh. He hurried to Amritsar, where a branch of the Bhangi family was in power. He consulted with his kinsmen and friends there. All shared the fear that, after having taken Lahore, Ranjit Singh would take Amritsar and other parts of the Panjab. They were all unanimously of the view that effective steps should be taken to curb Ranjit Singh's power before he became too strong. It

was decided that all Sikh Sardars, and even the Pathans of Kasur, should be brought together to oppose him.

Now, Ranjit Singh had twice led the combined forces of the Sikhs against Shah Zaman, and chased him out of the country. Thereby, he had become the hero of the Panjab. By ejecting the Bhangis from Lahore, he had taken a long leap on the road to ultimate supremacy. As his power and fame increased, the attitude of the other misaldars underwent a radical change. They had chosen him their leader in campaigns against their common enemy the Afghan invader. But his latest adventure and success had made them burn with hatred and jealousy. His former colleagues turned against him. They met to conspire against him. They allied themselves with the Bhangi Chiefs who had been turned out of Lahore.

Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur was also approached and informed of the intended campaign against Ranjit Singh. He readily joined their ranks. In fact, he had instigated some of the Sikh Sardars to conspire and rise against Ranjit Singh. His grievance against Ranjit Singh was that the latter had been chiefly instrumental in shattering his dreams of becoming the *Subedar* (Governor) of Lahore. Moreover, he had his fears about his own future, too. Ranjit Singh might, in time, decide to liquidate him.

All who were opposed to Ranjit Singh met at Amritsar. It was decided that he should be attacked and driven out of Lahore. Gulab Singh Bhangi was chosen to lead the combined forces of the dissident Sikh Chiefs. These forces, under Gulab Singh, and the Pathan forces, under Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur,

advanced towards Lahore in the spring of 1800. Ranjit Singh went out to meet them. He stopped their progress at Bhasin, a village about fifteen kilometres from Lahore.

Skirmishes took place now and then. There was no major or pitched battle. Gulab Singh Bhangi was not very eager or anxious to force a decision. He gave himself up to drinking country liquor and watching dances of nautch girls. One of his drinking bouts caused a haemorrhage which proved fatal. His death broke the spirits of the army which he had led. Dejected and disheartened, the soldiers melted away quietly. Ranjit Singh returned to Lahore, after a sort of two months' spring-time outing in the countryside.

A short time, thereafter, a chest containing twenty thousand gold mohars was unearthed in an old ruin named *Budhu da Ava*. His enemies having been scattered, and his treasury having been replenished, Ranjit Singh was fully established as the master of Lahore. He could now think of acquiring the rest of the Panjab.

(2)

A HOLY PEACE-MAKER

Ranjit Singh had captured the capital of the Panjab, no doubt, but he was yet far from being the ruler of the Panjab. As a matter of fact, the capture of Lahore had won him more enemies than allies. The experience of Bhasin had made him alert and cautious. He was sure that his enemies would sooner or later, come against him again. So, he decided not to give them

time to gang up for that purpose. He made up his mind to deal with them, one by one.

The first among his enemies to receive his attention was the Raja of Jammu. He had collaborated with Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur against him. Ranjit Singh decided to punish the Raja. He marched towards Jammu. In lightning marches he soon came within six kilometres of the city. The Raja was in panic. He had no guts to stand the attack. He made his submission at once. He readily paid a penalty in the form of an elephant and twenty thousand rupees. At the same time, he promised to be loyal in future. In this campaign Ranjit Singh added to his domains the towns of Vairawal, Narowal and Sarsowal.

Since their expulsion from Lahore and their dismal failure at Bhasin, the Bhangi Sardars had been busy in conspiring against Ranjit Singh. Sahib Singh Bhangi, in particular, had been secretly increasing his army and fighting strength. Then he approached Dal Singh, the Chief of Akalgarh. The two plotted to attack Gujranwala.

Ranjit Singh learnt of their plans and preparations. He decided to fall on them before they were completely ready to attack his city. With a body of ten thousand soldiers and twenty cannon, he marched towards Sahib Singh Bhangi's city of Gujrat. Reaching there, he laid siege to it. The attack was so sudden that the Bhangi Sardar was taken by surprise. He shut himself up in his fort. From the fort's walls he directed gunfire against the besiegers. The fire was returned by the besiegers with greater force and precision,

Soon the Bhangi Sardar realized that he would not be able to hold out very long. So, he sent his men to Baba Sahib Singh Bedi of Una. They were told to inform the venerable Baba Sahib about the situation at Gujrat and to pray for his immediate intervention.

On learning of the open rift between the two leading Sardars, Baba Sahib Singh Bedi hurried to Gujrat. In the name of the Guru, he ordered the parties to lay down their arms. Such was the prestige of this saint-soldier descendant of Guru Nanak Dev, that the Sardars at once obeyed him without demur. Ranjit Singh was the first to act. He untied his sword from his waist, and placed it on the ground before Baba Sahib. The other Sardars followed suit. For full one hour the swords lay on the ground. All the time the Sardars stood with hands folded and heads bowed. Then Baba Sahib Singh Bedi took up Ranjit Singh's sword, tied it round the Sardar's waist, and said to him 'Cheer up. Within a short time, all your opponents will be extirpated, and your rule will be established throughout the country. I wish you to leave Gujrat alone, and be friends with the Bhangi Sardars.'

Ranjit Singh obeyed and departed, leaving the town of Gujrat in the possession of Sahib Singh Bhangi. Then he proceeded towards Akalgarh in order to punish its chief, Dal Singh, who had plotted against him. Ranjit Singh captured the fort and took Dal Singh with him to Lahore. The Chief admitted his fault and prayed to be forgiven. Ranjit Singh readily pardoned his repentant enemy and left him in possession of his estate,

(3)

CORONATION

Ranjit Singh was, no doubt, acclaimed as the leader of the Panjab, and was in possession of the Panjab's capital town. He was thus, in all but name, the Maharaja of the Panjab. But he hesitated to assume the formal title of Maharaja. He had cogent reasons for this hesitation. He feared that his assumption of that title might antagonize the other Chiefs. They might again conspire against him. That would be bad, and even harmful ; for their strength was not inconsiderable. In addition, they could secure co-operation of persons like Nizamuddin Khan.

But things were moving in his favour. In February 1801 leaders of the chief cities of the Panjab, Ranjit Singh's prominent Sardars, and his whole army through its officers submitted a joint petition to him. In it they prayed that a large gathering be called at Lahore to which all Sikh Sardars should be invited. In that gathering, it was suggested, the title of Maharaja of the Panjab be given to him by the people.

Ranjit Singh was still hesitant. But Sada Kaur persuaded him to assume the title. She said to him, 'Your assumption of the title will mark the full realization of our dreams. I, for one, have been yearning and praying for this, all these years. By taking on the title of "Maharaja of the Panjab," you will assume rights of sovereignty not only over all Sikhs, but also over the people who live within the geographical limits of the Panjab. It will give you a legal right to demand that the territories which, at any time, paid revenue to

Lahore, should pay tribute and owe allegiance to you. As you know, such territories are Jammu, Kashmir, the Rajput hill states, Multan, Bahawalpur, Dera Ismail Khan, Dera Gazi Khan, Mankera etc. The assumption of the title will open up charming possibilities. So you must agree, my dear Lion Victor of Battles.'

At last Ranjit Singh agreed to a formal investiture. The *Baisakhi* day of 1801 A. D. (April 12) was fixed for the ceremony. On that day, prayers were said in the mosques, temples, and gurdwaras, all over his domains. A large gathering was held in the fort. It was attended, among others by all Sikh Sardars and important leaders of all towns and cities. When all was ready, prayers were said before Guru Granth Sahib by Bhai Gurmukh Singh, leader of the Lahore Sikhs. Then Baba Sahib Singh Bedi applied saffron mark on Ranjit Singh's forehead, and proclaimed him 'Maharaja of the Panjab'. A royal salute was fired from the fort. In the afternoon, the Maharaja rode on the back of a richly decorated elephant and paraded through the city's main streets. The streets were crowded by his jubilant subjects, who showered gold and silver coins. In the evening, there was *deep mala* in the city, that is, the city was illuminated with oil-lamps. There was also a rich display of fire-works. The popular rejoicing continued throughout the night.

(4)

A PANJABI STATE

Even after assuming the title of 'Maharaja of the Panjab', Ranjit Singh carefully avoided any display of his royal status. He wanted to be known more as a

peasant leader than as a king. He had been crowned king ; still he refused to wear an emblem of royalty on his simple turban. He refused to sit on a throne. He continued to hold *darbars* seated cross-legged in his chair. More often, he liked to sit reclined on cushions on a carpet, in the oriental fashion.

He ordered new coins to be struck. But the coins did not bear his effigy or his name. They bore, instead, the name and effigy of Guru Nanak. They were called *Nanak Shahi* coins, coins of the Emperor Nanak. Some coins had the same inscription in Persian as had appeared on the coins struck by Baba Banda Singh Bahadur, namely :—

'Deg o tegh o fateh o nusrat bedirang

Yaft az' Nanak Guru Gobind Singh.'

[The Kettle and the Sword (symbols of Charity and Power), victory, and ready patronage have been obtained from Guru Nanak Gobind Singh.]

Similarly, the seal of government did not bear his name, but the above Persian inscription. His government he called not his own but *Sarkar Khalsaji*, that is, of the people who had brought it into being. His court was called *Darbar Khalsaji*. He himself liked to be addressed by the simple title of *Singh Sahib*. By the people in general he was called *Sarkar*.

Soon after his coronation, Ranjit Singh directed his attention to re-organizing the administration, and improving the condition and look of Lahore. The city walls and gates were all repaired. He found that under

the Bhangi misrule crime had increased a great deal. To check it, he posted pickets at all strategic points. The city was divided into wards. Each ward had its *Chaudhri* or Headman, who was responsible for peace in his locality. He could call out the police when the order was disturbed. The first Head of Police (*Kotwal*) of Lahore was a Muslim named Imam Bakhsh.

He also reorganized the administration of justice, in such a way that cheap and ready justice was made available to all. The majority of the population was Muslim. They wanted their affairs to be regulated in accordance with the law of *shariat*. Hence, he appointed special courts for the Muslims. Nizam Din was appointed Chief *Quazi* (Judge). Two other well-qualified and trusted Muslims were appointed *muftis*.

A chain of dispensaries was opened in different parts of the city. In them Unani medicine was dispensed free of charge. Hakim Nuruddin, younger brother of Minister Fakir Aziz-ud-din, was appointed the Chief Medical Officer. Schools were opened in all parts of the city, where free education was imparted to children of all communities.

Within a short time, Ranjit Singh convinced the people that he did not intend to set up a Sikh Kingdom. He wanted, rather, to set up a Panjabi State in which all Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs would be equal before the law, and would have the same rights and duties. He invited talented Muslims and Hindus to join his service. Among his generals and ministers he had a number of Hindu and Muslims, too. He paid respect to their religious institutions by taking part in their



Fakir Nur-ud-Din
Health Minister

festivities. Soon, the Hindus and Muslims came to recognize that their language (Panjabi), their economic and political interests, and their way of life differed in no way from those of the Sikhs, that they were all Panjabis. In short, they came to feel that they had a ruler and a government of their own, which they had not had for centuries.

TAKING OF AMRITSAR

Amritsar was the Panjab's second largest city. But commercially, it was more important than the largest city, Lahore. It was the chief trading centre for northern India. Goods were brought here from Central Asia by caravans, and exchanged for products of India. It was, consequently, a rich and prosperous city. For the Sikhs, it was their most sacred place. Indeed, as far as the Sikhs were concerned, Amritsar was the most important place in the world. Therefore, for anyone who aspired to be the leader of the Sikhs and the Maharaja of the Panjab, it was necessary to take Amritsar in order to justify his aspiration and title.

Amritsar was, at that time, divided among about a dozen Bhangi families. They owned different parts of the city. Every family had built its own tiny fortress in the part owned by it. It had in employment a number of armed tax-collectors. These tax-collectors were avaricious and hard-hearted. They made heavy collections at the point of the sword. Moreover, there were frequent frictions between the tax-collectors of different families. Quite often, these frictions led to street fights. Consequently, the citizens were weary of, and disgusted with, this state of things. They made secret approaches to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, and requested him to come to their deliverance.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had already learnt that the Bhangi Sardars of Amritsar were preparing to fight against him. They were conspiring with Ramgarhias for that purpose. Mai Sukhan, the widow of the Bhangi Chief Gulab Singh, was said to be the most active participant in this conspiracy. It was she who had enlisted the Ramgarhias' support. Hers was the only family of importance in Amritsar. She was in occupation of the Govindgarh fort.

The Amritsar citizens' request reached the Maharaja in the autumn of 1802. Preparations for marching upon Amritsar were started at once. After a short time, the combined forces of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Sada Kaur, and Fateh Singh Ahluwalia reached near Amritsar. The city was encircled. The Ramgarhias who had promised to join the Amritsar Sardars, did not turn up. Their non-arrival was a great damper for the Sardars. They did not have the guts to come out to oppose the forces from Lahore. They shut up the city's gates. They mounted guns on their fortresses within the city and began to fire them on the besiegers.

Ranjit Singh was anxious to respect and preserve the sanctity of the Sikhs' most sacred city. After taking counsel with Sada Kaur, he ordered that guns with only blank powder charges were to be fired. Their noise would, he thought, help the Sardars to realize that resistance was useless. Loud war-cry of *Sat Sri Akal* was repeatedly raised aloud by the besieging Sikh forces. War-drums were beaten most energetically.

The booming of guns, the loud war-cries of *Sat Sri Akal*, and the thundering noise of the war-drums, filled



Akali Phula Singh
General

the people with fear and made them very nervous. They were all eager to end the struggle.

At that time, there was, in Amritsar, a remarkable person who was highly respected by the citizens, and who was destined to play a most significant part in the Maharaja's battles, and to become a most important general in his armies of conquest. That person was Akali Phula Singh.

Born in 1791 in village Shinh, Amritsar district, he had joined the *Nihang* order in early life. He had dedicated his life to the care of the Sikh shrines. He was most devout and sincere, and loved to serve the people in accordance with Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh's teachings. Consequently, he was highly respected by not only the citizens of Amritsar, but also by all others who knew or heard of him.

He was deeply distressed to find Sikh forces engaged in fighting among themselves. The spectacle of Sikhs firing on Sikhs was very painful to him. He consulted with the leading citizens. Then, accompanied by leaders of the Amritsar citizens, he marched out and stood between the opposing forces. He succeeded in persuading them to stop fighting. The Sardars surrendered one by one. Mai Sukhan was the last to agree to surrender. She gave up the fort. She was given a handsome pension for herself and her son, Gurdit Singh.

The fort of Amritsar thus passed into the Maharaja's hands. It was a valuable acquisition. He also acquired five cannon. One of them was Ahmad Shah Abdali's large Zam Zam, which had caused havoc among the

Maratha ranks at Panipat. It had been taken from the Afghans by the Bhangi Sardars. Since then it had been named the *Bhangian di tope*.

Akali Phula Singh was largely responsible for Maharaja Ranjit Singh's easy and bloodless victory at Amritsar. The Maharaja invited him to join his army. He agreed. He brought with him between two to three thousand *Nihangs* or *Akalis* to join the State Army. This acquisition, namely, that of Baba Phula Singh and his Akalis, was, for the Maharaja, far more important than the acquisition of the Amritsar fort and its five cannon. The Maharaja owed many of his celebrated victories to the desperate bravery of Baba Phula Singh and his Akalis.

The holy city of Amritsar, thus became a part of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's domain in December 1802. He was given a rousing, tumultuous reception in the sacred city. He rode through its narrow streets mounted on a decorated elephant. He was everywhere cheered most lustily by the jubilant crowds.

He and his Sardars then went to pay homage at the sacred shrine, the Darbar Sahib. They bathed in the sacred pool and made large offerings at the temple. The Maharaja donated a large sum with which the temple was to be built in marble and gold leaf.

TOWARDS A UNITED PANJAB

(1)

JHANG

A number of independent principalities still existed in the Panjab. Some of them still continued to declare their allegiance to Afghanistan. The Maharaja's ambition to create a united Panjab could not be fulfilled until these independent principalities were made to declare allegiance to the government of the Panjab. Accordingly, he sent invitations to these principalities to do so. Many of them complied. But some of them contemptuously turned down the Maharaja's invitation. Among them who did so was Ahmad Khan Sial, who owned the territories of Jhang. He was very very rich and the best horse-breeder of the Panjab.

As was but natural, the Maharaja decided to humble the pride of Ahmad Khan. In the beginning of 1803, he led his troops against Jhang. Ahmad Khan declared *Jihad* and enlisted thousands of Sial and Kharl tribesmen to help him in his 'holy war' against the infidel Sikhs. So, he appeared in the field at the head of a formidable host. On the arrival of the Lahore forces, the battle started with cannonade from both sides. When Ahmad Khan's *Ghazis* (Muslim crusaders) had

exhausted their gunpowder, their horsemen made a fierce charge. The Maharaja's troops successfully withstood the fierce attack. Then they made the counter-attack. The Sials galloped away and took shelter in their fortress town. The Maharaja's elephants crashed one of the gates. His forces rushed in and compelled the Sials to lay down their arms.

In the commotion of the hand-to-hand fight in the fortress, Ahmad Khan managed to slip away to Multan. But after some time, he came to realize that the Maharaja did not want to deprive him of his territory; that what he wanted was to induce the Sials and other tribesmen of the region to throw in their lot with their Panjabi brethren.

So persuaded, he sent a deputation to the Maharaja. He admitted his mistake, prayed to be forgiven and agreed to make his submission. The Maharaja was ever ready to forget and forgive. He reinstated Ahmad Khan at Jhang. Ahmad Khan undertook to pay six thousand rupees as annual revenue to the Panjab government. He also gave the Maharaja a number of his best-bred horses.

(2)

KASUR

Nizamuddin Khan of Kasur was a sworn and long-standing foe of the Sikhs and Maharaja Ranjit Singh. As we know, he had invited Shah Zaman to attack the Panjab. Then he had joined his own forces with those of the invaders and fought against the Sikhs who were led

by Ranjit Singh. Then he tried to persuade the Muslims of Lahore to invite and help him to assume *Subedari* of Lahore. Then he joined the dissident Sikh Sardars and fought against Maharaja Ranjit Singh at Bhasin. Still later, he conspired with Sahib Singh Bhangi of Gujrat against the Maharaja.

On account of all this, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was convinced that, unless Nizamuddin Khan's power was completely broken, he would continue to conspire and create trouble. Hence, after settling the affairs of Lahore, he turned his attention to the Pathans of Kasur. Towards the end of 1801, he sent Fatch Singh Kalianwala to chastise Nizamuddin. The Pathans came out to meet the advancing Lahore troops. They fought with desperate bravery. But they soon had to retreat behind the walls of the town. The siege did not last long. The Lahore troops blew up one of the gates. They entered the town and began moving down the Pathans. The latter laid down their arms. Nizamuddin agreed to pay a heavy penalty and to recognize Maharaja Ranjit Singh as his sovereign. The Maharaja accepted this.

But Nizamuddin did not keep the peace for long. Soon, he forgot his oath of allegiance to the Lahore Darbar. When the Maharaja was engaged in dealing with the small Muslim principalities in the south, Nizamuddin took advantage of his absence. He plundered some villages near Lahore. On hearing this, the Maharaja returned hurriedly and made straight for Kasur. Nizamuddin withdrew his troops into the town. He made preparations to stand a long siege. Ranjit Singh ordered heavy guns to be brought from Lahore. They soon pounded the walls of the fort. Nizamuddin

surrendered. The ever generous Maharaja pardoned him once again, and allowed him to keep his territory as before. Nizamuddin swore once more to be loyal to the Lahore Darbar.

After Nizamuddin's death, his place was taken by his brother Kutubuddin Khan. He began to make preparations to aim another blow at Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He enlisted a large number of fanatic Muslims for *Jihad* or holy war against the 'infidel' Sikhs. He fortified Kasur and stocked the fort with provisions that would be sufficient to outlast a long siege. He persuaded Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan to supply him with trained soldiers and war-material.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh learnt of what Kutubuddin Khan was doing. He sent his minister Fakir Azizuddin to Kasur in order to persuade Kutubuddin to give up his planned disloyal action against the Maharaja. Fakir Azizuddin used all his arts of persuasion. At the end of his long talk, he said, 'Khan Sahib, the days of religious wars are gone. The Maharaja commands the affection and loyalty of thousands of Muslims. It is wrong to say that to fight him and his troops is to engage in a *Jihad*. You will be fighting not against Sikhs but Panjabis—Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. You should not think of engaging in such a fight. I would advise you to continue to be faithful to the Maharaja and the government of the Panjab.'

But Kutubuddin Khan refused to give in. He said, 'Be gone. I refuse to listen to one who eats the salt of an infidel. You are not much better than an infidel

yourself. Tell your master to come. I am ready to receive him.'

On hearing Fakir Azizuddin's report the Maharaja made ready to deal with Kutubuddin Khan. He led his army himself. Akali Phula Singh, with his band of Nihangs, also accompanied the Maharaja.

The battle began on the morning of February 10, 1807. In the beginning, Akali Phula Singh and his Nihangs led the attack on the *Ghazis* or Muslim crusaders. The latter were driven behind their stockades. Then the artillery went into action. For full one month the Sikh guns continued firing on the walls of the Kasur fort. They failed to make any impression. At last, one night, Sikh miners made a tunnel up to the base of the western bastion. A heavy charge of gunpowder was put under it. It was fired early in the morning. It tore a large gap in the wall. Akali Phula Singh and his Nihangs charged through the breach. After a fierce hand-to-hand fight, the Akalis succeeded in vanquishing the Pathans and the *Ghazis*.

The fort was thus captured. Kutubuddin Khan tried to run away. He was, however, caught and brought before the Maharaja.

Ranjit Singh again showed his unique, wonderful magnanimity in treating his defeated adversary. He forgot Kutubuddin Khan's harsh, rude words against him and his Sikhs, he forgot the treacherous conduct of his family over the years; he forgot their repeated attempts to overthrow his government. He not only foregave Kutubuddin Khan and spared his life, but also

granted him a handsome *jagir* at Mamdot. Kasur was made a part of the Panjab under the Lahore Darbar.

(3)

MULTAN

Multan was a district of the Panjab. It had been taken by the Bhangi Sardars more than once. But they had been ejected from there. Since the Afghan invasions, Multan began to have closer administrative ties with Kabul than with Lahore. Its ruling family, being Muslim, considered an alliance with the Afghans more convenient than one with Lahore. Ranjit Singh was determined to reclaim Multan and bring it within the country to which it belonged, that is, to make its ruler owe allegiance to Lahore instead of to Kabul.

Early in 1803, he announced his intention to proceed to Multan. Almost all his Sardars advised him against undertaking the expedition. They thought that Nawab Muzaffar Khan of Multan would prove too strong for the Lahore forces. But Maharaja Ranjit Singh struck to his resolve. He marched out of Lahore at the head of his troops.

Nawab Muzaffar Khan, on his part, was fully prepared to meet Ranjit Singh's attack. Raising the familiar cry of *Jihad* or holy war against the 'infidel' Sikhs, he had roused the Muslims of the neighbouring districts to come to his aid. They came in their thousands. But they could not stop the advance of the Lahore forces. The latter entered the suburbs of Multan without any difficulty. They directed their gun fire on the mud fort which was in the heart of the city. Muzaffar

Khan soon realized that he could not hold out for long. So, he made his submission. He agreed to pay indemnity, send his quota of revenue to Lahore instead of sending it to Kabul, and remain faithful to the Lahore Darbar. Thus Multan became a part of the Panjab.

But Muzaffar Khan soon forgot his oath of allegiance to the Lahore Darbar. In '807, he helped Kutubuddin Khan of Kasur against the Maharaja by sending troops and war material. After dealing with Kutubuddin Khan of Kasur, Maharaja Ranjit Singh decided to punish Muzaffar Khan for his share in Kutubuddin's defiance of the Lahore Darbar's authority. He ordered his army to proceed from Kasur to Multan. As before, Muzaffar Khan began to rouse his Muslim neighbours to come to his aid against the 'infidel' Sikhs; but this time none was willing to share his adventure. The Lahore forces entered the city unchecked. Muzaffar Khan found that resistance was useless. He made his submission and prayed for forgiveness. The ever generous Maharaja forgave him again. The Nawab paid twenty thousand rupees as penalty for his assistance to Kutubuddin Khan of Kasur.

But Muzaffar Khan was incorrigible. He again began to hold back payment of the promised revenue. Even otherwise, his conduct was obstructive and far from desirable. Influenced by his example, other southern Nawabs also became tardy in paying the revenues due to the Lahore Darbar.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh was convinced that Muzaffar Khan was untrustworthy; that he would ever be posing a grave danger to the government of the Panjab.

He decided that for the creation of a united Panjab, it was necessary to liquidate the Nawab. Hence, early in 1818, he decided to make an all-out effort to capture Multan. A force of twenty thousand, under the command of Prince Khark Singh and Misr Dewan Chand, was ordered to Multan. Artillery, under the command of Ilahi Bakhsh, was also ordered to proceed thither.

Nawab Muzaffar became aware of the Lahore Darbar's preparations against him. He realized that this time he would not be able to bribe or buy off the Darbar. As before, he roused the Muslim population of the countryside to fight a holy war against the 'infidel' Sikhs. He got a good response this time. He also prepared the city and the fort for a long siege.

In due course, the Darbar forces arrived near Multan. The first engagement was in the open. Here the *Ghazis*—Muslim crusaders—did most of the fighting. The battle lasted one day. The *Ghazis* gained the martyrdom that they sought. Muzaffar Khan withdrew his regular forces behind the city walls. The Lahore troops surrounded the city and began to bombard its walls. For about two weeks, the defenders held their own in the city. But by then the city wall was blown up at several points. The Lahore army entered the city. The defenders retreated into the fort.

For a whole month, Ilahi Bakhsh's batteries pounded the fort walls, without making any impression. The Bhangi cannon, *Zam Zam*, was brought up. With each shot it sent eighty pounds of solid metal into the wall, and tore huge holes in it. The

other cannon also went on doing their work. The gunners worked with wonderful enthusiasm. But the besieged with equally dauntless bravery, plugged up the holes in the fort-walls. This went on for a pretty long time.

Then, one night, a party of Akalis or Nihangs, under the cover of darkness, managed to lay a mine under the fort-wall. Next morning, a huge portion of the fort-wall was blown off.

Thereupon Nawab Muzaffar Khan decided to surrender. He sent his envoys to discuss and settle terms of surrender. He accepted the terms and asked for a treaty to be drawn up accordingly. A draft was prepared. When, however, it was presented to him for signature, he was dissuaded by his soldiers from signing it. 'It is better' said the brave soldiers, 'to die in honour than to live in shame. We will not surrender, but fight the enemy to the last.'

The Nawab, accordingly, refused to sign the treaty. He got ready to fight. The breaches in the fort-wall were plugged up during the night. The besieged then hurled defiance at the besiegers.

So the attack was renewed. The gunners did their work with greater enthusiasm and precision. Many daring deeds of matchless bravery were performed, and many soul-stirring incidents occurred, during that historic siege of Multan.

One such soul-stirring incident is recorded by a Muslim eye-witness, named Ghulam Jilani, in his book

Jang-i-Multan (Battle of Multan). He says :—

‘While the bombardment of the fort-walls was going on, one of the Sikh guns lost one of its wheels. The Sardar in charge of the gun was of the opinion that if he could fire a few more shots, he would certainly succeed in making a breach in the wall. But that could not be done unless the lost wheel were replaced. There was no time for repairs. The delay was very dangerous. But from where to get the wheel or a substitute ? He had a brain wave, inspired, no doubt, by his unlimited, irrepressible enthusiasm for the cause. He said to his gunner, “There is only one way to achieve our purpose. We should come forward to serve as the wheel. We should lay our shoulders, one by one, under the axle on the broken side. The gun should go on firing shots till a breach is made in the fort-wall. Our lives will be lost, no doubt; but it will be a worthy contribution towards the victory of the *Panth*. We should gladly sacrifice our lives for the honour of the *Khalsa*. What is your opinion, brother ? Be quick. No time for deliberation.”

‘All his gunners jumped at the idea. Every one of them wanted to be the first to make the supreme sacrifice. There was wrangling amongst them for priority. But they were soon silenced by the Sardar. He said, ‘that they should come in only in the order of their ranks.’ “As I am the senior most,” added he, ‘I shall go in first of all. Others should follow in the order of their seniority.’ He did accordingly. He supported the axle on his shoulder. The gun was fired. He fell down dead under the pressure of the gun.

'One by one, the brave gunners went forward to lay down their lives as their leader had done. It was after the tenth or eleventh shot that a breach was made in the wall. By then as many of the brave, patriotic gunners had sacrificed their lives under the pressure of the gun. As soon as the breach was made, Akali Sadhu Singh and his Akalis rushed to the spot with swords in hands, shouting *Sat Sri Akal*, and made a desperate charge through the breach.

'I saw this all happen before my eyes. More than once even I felt inspired and moved by this spirit of self-sacrifice to follow the brave gunners under the axle. But if there was anything that kept me back, it was nothing but the desire in my mind to narrate to the world the story of this unique spirit of self-sacrifice of these Sikhs in the cause of their nation.'

As said above, Akali Sadhu Singh and his Akalis made a desperate charge through the breach which the brave, self-sacrificing Sikh gunners had helped to make at the cost of their lives. The Nihangs under their leader closed upon the defenders and drove them back till they came to the steps of Muzzaffar Khan's palace. The old Nawab and his sons donned the green dress of their faith, perfumed their beards, and, with drawn swords, 'came out to answer the call of the angel of death.' They fought like heroes. But the odds were too heavy against them. Nawab Muzaffer Khan, his two sons, and a nephew of his were killed. His two younger sons were captured alive.

The fort was captured on June 2, 1818. A few days later, one of Muzaffer Khan's younger sons was brought into the Maharaja's court. The Maharaja had heard with

admiration of the bravery displayed by the old Nawab. He admired bravery above all manly virtues. He got up from his seat and took up the young Nawab in his arms and hugged him. That was how he treated a brave adversary's son.

A few days later, Nawab Muzaffar Khan's second captive son was brought to Lahore and taken to the Maharaja's court. The Maharaja got up from his seat, embraced the boy, and made him sit by his side. The lad said a lot of things against the Darbar troops and accused them of treachery. The Maharaja heard it all without feeling angry or annoyed even in the least. He only smiled and patted the lad in admiration.

That was how the lion-hearted, generous Maharaja received the sons of a fallen brave though troublesome adversary. Later, he granted the boys handsome *jagirs* for their maintenance.

Here one is tempted to recall the treatment which Nawab Wazir Khan of Sarhind had accorded to the two younger sons of Guru Gobind Singh. They were brick-ed alive. Their only fault was that they were sons of a brave adversary. Here a devout follower of Guru Gobind Singh acting in a truly Sikh spirit spared the lives of his brave adversary's sons, treated them with affection, and gave them handsome *jagirs*. He forgot all the wrong actions of their father.

The conquest of Multan ended the Afghan influence in the Panjab, and broke up the solid group of Muslim states in the south. It subdued the chiefs of Bahawalpur, Dera Ghazikhan, Dera Ismail Khan, and Mankera. Moreover, Multan by itself was a valuable acquisition. It yielded an annual revenue of seven lakhs.

KOH-I-NOOR (THE MOUNT OF LIGHT)

(1)

THE ROYAL AFGHAN REFUGEES

How the world-famous Koh-i-Noor (the Mount of Light) came into Maharaja Ranjit Singh's hands is an interesting story. This priceless jewel, the most brilliant of all diamonds of the world, was taken from the famous mines of Golconda in very ancient times. In the oldest times it is recorded as being in the possession of the Pandavas. Then it went 'underground'. It remained concealed or buried somewhere. In February 1628, it came into the hands of the Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan. In January 1739, the Persian invader, Nadir Shah took it, alongwith the Peacock Throne, from the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. On Nadir Shah's assassination in June 1749, this priceless jewel came into the hands of Ahmad Shah Abdali. After the latter's death it became the possession of his son, Taimur. After Taimur's death it was taken over by Shah Zaman. From him it came into the possession of Shah Shuja and his wife, Wafa Begum. It was from these two that the Koh-i-Noor came into Maharaja Ranjit Singh's hands on June 1, 1813.

In order to understand how and why Shah Shuja and his wife, Wafa Begum, parted with this precious possession of theirs, we shall have to peep a little into Afghanistan's history. After Taimur's death, Shah Zaman ascended the throne of Kabul. He was soon overthrown and replaced by his brother Mahmud. The latter put out his brother Shah Zaman's eyes, in order to put him out of the picture for ever. But soon, Shah Shuja, a brother of his, ousted Mahmud from Kabul and occupied the throne. Soon, however, Shah Shuja was expelled and Mahmud re-occupied the throne of Kabul. Shah Shuja was able, once again, to capture the throne, but was deprived of it again by his brother Mahmud after four months. All this drama of seating and unseating this or that son of Taimur was done by one Wazir Fateh Khan, leader of Barakazai tribe.

Driven from the throne, Shah Shuja fled to Attock. There he found asylum with its governor, Jahan Dad Khan. But, while at Attock Shah Shuja began to try to win over the king-maker, Wazir Fateh Khan, Jahan Dad Khan was bitterly opposed to the Wazir. When therefore he came to know of Shah Shuja's move, he had him put in chains and sent for safe custody to his brother; Ata Muhammad, governor of Kashmir.

In February 1810, the six hundred and odd wives of Shah Shuja, and the blinded Shah Zaman, with his concourse of wives, came to the Panjab and prayed for asylum. Maharaja Ranjit Singh granted them a liberal pension and made arrangements for their residence at Rawalpindi. But Shah Zaman would not sit idle even in exile. He began to send envoys to foreign powers. They were to persuade those foreign powers



Fakir Aziz-ud-Din
Prime Minister

to help him in recovering the throne of Kabul. Maharaja Ranjit Singh did not like this. To put an end to Shah Zaman's intercourse with foreign powers, he suggested that the royal families would be more comfortable and secure in the capital.

In November 1811, Shah Zaman, the one-time conqueror of Lahore, and his wives and relations came back to that city as beggars.*

On arrival at Lahore, Shah Zaman was treated with honour. He was escorted by State troops to the spacious house. Mubarak Haveli, set apart for him in the city. The Maharaja, dressed in ceremonial saffron, welcomed him with an embrace. He then presented to him a sum of one thousand rupees.

(2)

DELIVERERS

Thus sheltered and provided for the royal refugees from Afghanistan began to live a life of peace in Lahore. Fakir Azizuddin was deputed to look after their comforts. But after some time, there arrived in Lahore an agent of Wazir Fateh Khan. His object was to solicit the Maharaja's help for conquest of Kashmir. On behalf of Wazir Fateh Khan, the agent offered to the Maharaja an equal division of the loot acquired during the campaign, and, thereafter, nine lakh rupees every year.

*While leaving for home after his fourth invasion, Shah Zaman had proclaimed that he would return soon and conquer India. He had come back now, but not as an invader or would-be conqueror but as a beggar to seek asylum from Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Did he remember his parting threat to Ranjit Singh and the Panjab ?

Shah Zaman and his relations learnt of the agent's arrival and mission. Shah Zaman, Shah Shuja's senior wife, Wafa Begam, and her sons were terrified. They feared that if Wazir Fateh Khan and Mahmud captured Kashmir, Shah Shuja, who was imprisoned there, would fall into their hands. Who could say what they would do to him. Wafa Begam was stricken with deep grief and anxiety. She sent a message to the Maharaja through Fakir Azizuddin, saying, 'If the Maharaja puts forth good efforts and brings about the occasion when the honourable Shah may come to Lahore, an invaluable piece of diamond would be offered in compensation.' That 'invaluable piece of diamond' was no other than the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

The Maharaja took counsel with his courtiers. They expressed themselves in favour of making all efforts to get Shah Shuja released from captivity and restored to his grief-stricken family. It was a humane task which, as Guru Nanak-Guru Gobind Singh's Sikhs, it was their duty to perform. They also felt that this task would become easier if the Darbar forces were to work in conjunction with those of Wazir Fateh Khan. It would, thereby, be possible to fulfil the objective of the Wazir as well as that of Shah Shuja's family.

Accordingly, early in the spring of 1812, the pick of the Darbar's troops were ordered to Kashmir. They were under the command of the Maharaja's best generals, Diwan Mohkam Chand and Dal Singh. They reached Jehlam where they were joined by Wazir Fateh Khan and his army.

The two armies left Jehlam in the first week of December 1812. The shrewd Diwan Mohkam Chand

soon realized that the Wazir was not sincere and that he was not likely to keep his promises given to the Darbar. He warned the Maharaja and told him, 'Wazir Fateh Khan has taken two big forts with their treasuries. He has kept the whole loot. He should have given half of it to the Darbar as promised.'

The Maharaja instructed Diwan Mohkam Chand to give no sign of any dissatisfaction or doubt. He added, 'Go on conforming with his wishes. Remember that our main object is not loot or territory, but release of the unlucky Shah. We have to concentrate on that humane task.'

It was learnt that Shah Shuja was imprisoned in the fort of Shergarh. The Afghans pressed on at frantic speed. They wanted to reach Shergarh before the Darbar forces should do so. They were soon two marches ahead of the Lahore army. Diwan Mohkam Chand felt sure that if the Afghans managed to reach there first, they would do violence to Shah Shuja. So, he made a short cut and reached Shergarh before the Afghans. He at once assaulted the fort. The Afghans also reached soon and joined in the assault. The fort was forced to surrender. The Afghans rushed in and busied themselves in discovering and looting the treasury. But Diwan Mohkam Chand's soldiers rushed about searching for the royal prisoner. They found him in a damp, dark dungeon. He was chained, hand and foot, dressed in dirty rags, and famished from want of adequate food. They brought him away and took him to their camp. Wazir Fateh Khan demanded that Shah Shuja be handed over to him. But Diwan Mohkam Chand firmly refused to do so. Thereupon

the Wazir tried to take the Shah by force. But he failed in his attempt. Then he accused Diwan Mohkam Chand of breaking his word and said, 'I will not give you any share in the booty.'

Shah Shuja's chains were broken. He was dressed in new clothes and properly fed. Then he was taken to Lahore with due honour and safety.

(3)

KOH-I-NOOR CHANGES HANDS

In due course Shah Shuja reached Lahore with the Darbar army. The Maharaja received him with the same pomp and ceremonial as that with which he had received his blinded brother, Shah Zaman, a year earlier. The Shah was delivered safely to Wafa Begam at Mubarak Haveli, the spacious mansion which had been placed at the disposal of the royal Afghan refugees.

On the following day, a message was sent to Shah Shuja and his wife. Wafa Begam, asking them to deliver the Koh-i-noor. Neither the Shah nor his wife made any reply to the note. It was but natural for them to feel unwilling to part with so precious an object. But it had been solemnly promised to be handed over on the Shah's deliverance and return to his family. In the venture, over one thousand soldiers had been sacrificed and a huge expenditure had been incurred. Moreover, Wazir Fateh Khan had taken possession of Kashmir without sharing the loot. He had clearly no intention of paying nine lakh rupees a year as promised. [All this was due to the Darbar's forces having rescued

and brought over Shah Shuja and not having handed him over to his bitter enemy Wazir Fateh Khan. In view of all this, how could the Darbar let the Shah and his wife break her promise ?

A reminder was sent to the Begam after a few days. Again there was no reply, no response. Then Fakir Azizuddin met her and urged her to honour her word. He told her how much the venture undertaken to release her husband had cost the Darbar. He added, 'It was on account of my strong persuasion that the Maharaja undertook the difficult, costly campaign. I assured him that you would most readily honour your word. Please realize my awkward ugly position. I feel very awkward, even ashamed. The Maharaja has a good reason to be angry with me. He might cease to trust me in future. Honour your word and let the Maharaja have the promised priceless precious stone.'

The Begam replied, 'The said diamond is not with me. I pawned it with a moneylender in Kandhar.'

Fakir Azizuddin said, 'Then why did you promise to give something which you did not possess ?' The Begam kept mum.

On hearing the Begam's reply, the Maharaja shook his head, and said, 'I have not the least doubt that the diamond is with the Begam. She is telling a lie. She is a liar and promise-breaker. But I don't want to employ any hard measures at present. I would make her a fair offer. Go and tell her that I shall make a token payment of three lakh rupees now and assign a *jagir* of fifteen thousand rupees a year to the family in lieu of the *Koh-i-Noor*.' But even this liberal offer

failed to bring round the Begam and her husband. Fakir Azizuddin's urgent appeals had no effect on them.

The Maharaja's patience was exhausted. He could have taken possession of the diamond by force. Seeing the way in which it had been taken away from India, such a course would have been quite excusable. But the Maharaja decided to avoid violence. The course followed by him was an honourable one.

The Maharaja sent word to the Shah and his wife that the diamonds should be delivered without any further fuss or delay. He decided to give an indication of what the consequences of the Begam's persistent refusal to honour her word would be. He placed a heavy guard round Mubarak Haveli. In this way, Shah Shuja, who had till then been a royal guest, became a virtual prisoner.

But for many days, the Shah made no move. The Maharaja then ordered that the rations supplied to the Shah's household be reduced. The Kotwal was instructed that the Shah and his family were to be treated as being under arrest. Soon the Shah realized that he had no alternative to handing over the Koh-i-Noor. So at last, he agreed to honour his wife's word. A date was fixed for the delivery of the coveted jewel.

On the appointed day, June 1, 1813, the Maharaja rode to Mubarak Haveli to take over the Koh-i-Noor. He was accompanied by six hundred horsemen. Shah Shuja received him cordially, embraced him, and conducted him to his room. Seated there, they inquired

about each other's health. Then they fell silent. Shah Shuja made no move to deliver the diamond. The prolonged silence irritated the Maharaja. He whispered to one of his courtiers, 'Remind the Shah of the object of our visit. He seems to be lost in thought.'

On being reminded, the Shah beckoned one of his servants and ordered him to bring the diamond. The servant went into the ladies' compartment. He came back with a bundle. He gave it to the Maharaja. The Maharaja unwrapped the bundle, the Koh-i-Noor came out. He examined it keenly with his single right eye. He then rewrapped it in the same cloth and rode away.

The Maharaja was delighted with the possession of the Koh-i-Noor. A week later he brought it out for examination. He showed it to some select jewellers. They declared that it was priceless, for no other similar jewel existed anywhere else. It was three and a half tolas or about forty one grammes in weight and equal to a hen's egg in size.

TOWARDS A GREATER PANJAB

(1)

END OF THE GURKHA MENACE

In 1809 the Gurkhas under Amar Singh Thapa subdued the hill chieftains along the Himalayan range. They were now trying hard to capture Kangra. Sansar Chand, ruler of Kangra, appealed to Maharaja Ranjit Singh to help him against the Gurkhas. On the other hand, the Gurkha leader sent word to the Maharaja, 'If you stay away and let me take Kangra, I shall pay tribute to you according to your pleasure.'

But the Maharaja considered Kangra to be a part of the Panjab. He would not let it be captured by the Nepalese. So he replied that he would defend Kangra against all outsiders. Sansar Chand's request was considered favourably. It was agreed to help him against the Gurkhas, but on one condition, namely, that he must declare Kangra to be a part of the Panjab, and surrender the Kangra fort to the Lahore forces. Sansar Chand accepted these terms.

To begin with, the Maharaja ordered all the chiefs of the Kangra region to stop selling provisions to the Gurkha army. He ordered his own troops to cut the Gurkhas' supply lines with Nepal. The Maharaja arrived

in Kangra and demanded admission to the fort. Sansar Chand hesitated and made evasive replies. He said, 'I shall hand over the fort as soon as the Gurkhas are made to withdraw.'

The Maharaja knew that Sansar Chand was not a man of word. His word could not be trusted. Moreover, the Maharaja was too shrewd to be taken in by Sansar Chand's ruse. Now, it so happened that one of Sansar Chand's sons was the Maharaja's hostage. The Maharaja put him under arrest. This step opened Sansar Chand's eyes. He surrendered the fort. On August 14, 1809, a detachment of the Panjab troops took possession of the Kangra fort.

The Gurkhas were soon short of rations, and hence, in great difficulties. Still they held on stubbornly. The Maharaja waited till they ran out of rations. Then they began to retreat. Thereupon the Maharaja attacked them with full force. Amar Singh Thapa turned back to face the attack. But having been short of rations for many days, the Gurkhas could not stand the strain of hand-to-hand fight against the Panjab infantry. The tall Sikhs, with their long curved *kirpans*, fell upon the short-statured Gurkhas, who were armed with their short *khukris*. The Maharaja had been watching the fight from a mound. He mounted his horse and plunged into the fight. The Gurkhas took to their heels.

The Maharaja was greatly impressed by the stubborn resistance offered by the Gurkhas. To honour brave men and reward their deeds of bravery was a major attribute of the Maharaja's character. When the fight with the Gurkhas was over, the Maharaja

ordered his men not to chase the defeated, fleeing, brave adversaries. He allowed Amar Singh Thapa time to retire without further molestation. Nay, he ordered his own Sardars to help the brave Gurkhas in collecting their equipment. Some hill-rajahs utilized the occasion to plunder the vanquished foe. They were severely rebuked by the Maharaja and made to restore the loot. The Gurkhas returned to their homes. The Gurkha menace to the Panjab was thus ended for ever.

The Maharaja entered the fort of Kangra on December 24, 1809. Among the chiefs who paid homage to him were the rulers of Kangra, Chamba, Noorpur, Kulu and Datarpur, Kotla Jasrata, Basohli, Jaswan, Mandi, Suket.

(2)

END OF THE AFGHAN MENACE

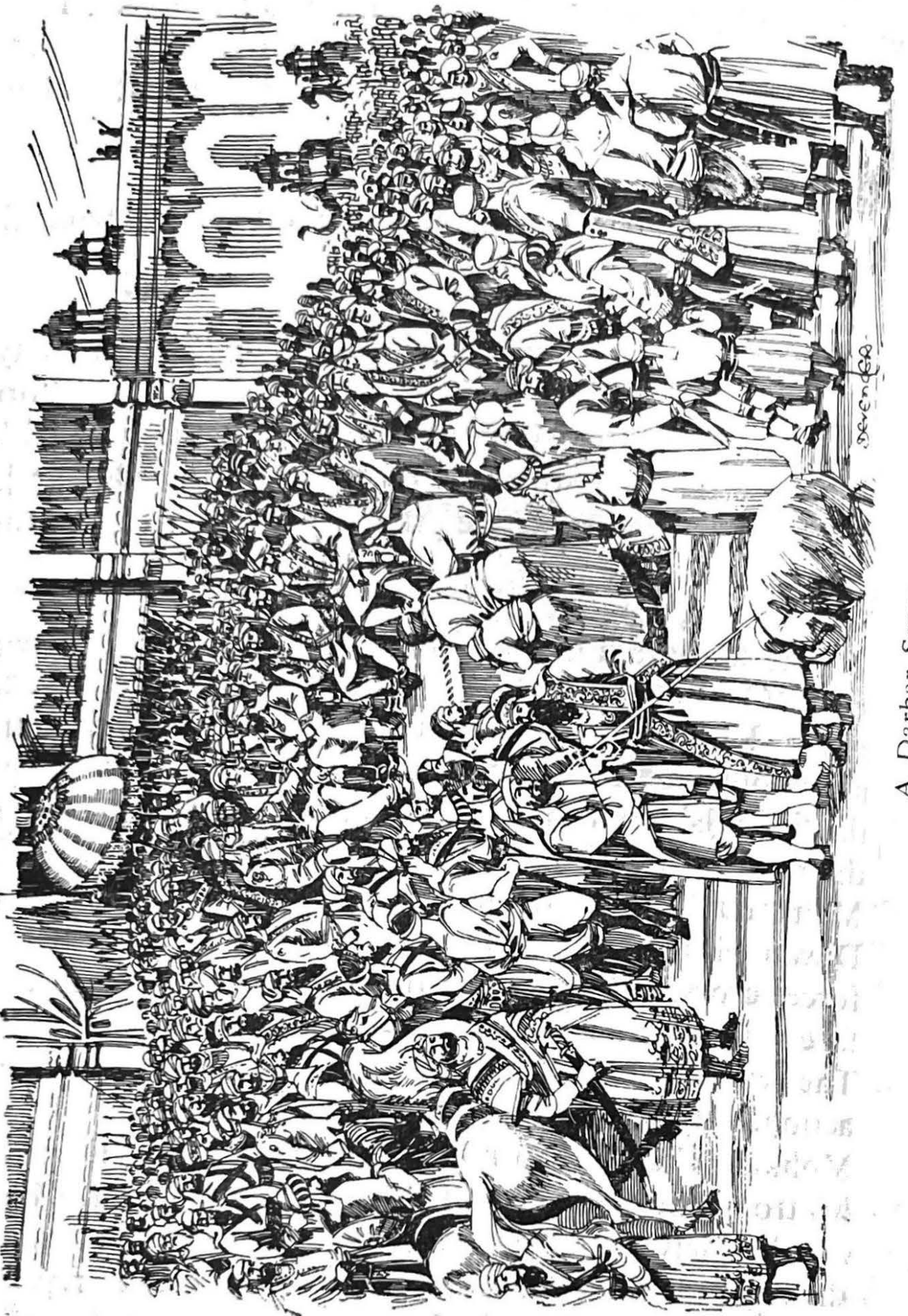
The fort of Attock was in the possession of Jahan Dad Khan. His brother, Ata Muhammad Khan was the governor of Kashmir. Ata Muhammad had been ejected from Kashmir by Wazir Fateh Khan. The Wazir's next victim was to be Jahan Dad Khan. The Maharaja came to know of the Wazir's design. The Maharaja's plan was to make Attock and its neighbourhood a part of the Panjab. If the fort of Attock were to pass into Wazir Fateh Khan's hands, the plan would become difficult of execution. So, in order to prevent the fort from passing into the Wazir's hands, the Maharaja decided to take it into his own possession. He sent his minister Fakir Azizuddin to negotiate with Jahan Dad Khan. Fakir Azizuddin said to him, "You know or should know that Wazir Fateh Khan

is after you. If he comes, you will not be able to withstand him. He will turn you out of the fort. You will have nowhere to go ! I come with a generous offer from the Maharaja. He will give you a handsome *jagir* in return for the fort."

Jahan Dad Khan accepted the offer and handed over the fort to Fakir Azizuddin.

The Attock fort was considered to be the gateway of India. When Wazir Fateh Khan heard that the fort had passed into the Maharaja's hands, he was mad with anger and disappointment. He wrote to the Maharaja asking him to evacuate the fort or face the consequences.

The Maharaja had no intention to oblige the Wazir. He sent more troops to garrison the fort. Wazir Fateh Khan began to incite the tribes in the neighbourhood of Attock and to exhort them to expel the 'infidels' from their midst. He himself came up at the head of his troops and surrounded the fort. The Maharaja sent a strong force under the charge of Diwan Mohkam Chand to meet the Wazir. The Panjab forces crossed the river Attock. They came face to face with Wazir Fateh Khan and his Afghan troops. The two armies faced each other without going into action. By then the summer season set in. Diwan Mohkam Chand then made a clever move. He placed his troops between the Afghans and the river. Finding themselves thus cut off from their supply of water, the Afghans took the initiative. They made repeated charges on the Panjab forces in their bid to break through to the river. Diwan Mohkam Chand got his



A Darbar Scene

Sevend 68

elephant's legs chained. This he did to prevent it from running back. The Panjabi lines remained unbroken. The Panjab infantry repulsed the Afghan assault with their steady fire.

The Panjabis could slake their thirst from the river and come back to the battle. The Afghans, on the other hand, had to fight in the intense heat of July without a drop of water to drink. Hence they turned their attention from the fort to the river. They wanted to reach the banks of the Attock. The Panjabis repulsed the Afghans and kept them away from the river banks. At last, the Afghans were exhausted with thirst and exertion. They broke their ranks and fled. They left their heavy guns and equipment to the victors. One thousand Afghans lay dead on the field.

This was the first victory of the Panjabis against the Afghans. The fort of Attock had been regarded as the sentinel of India. It had been taken from the Hindu Raja Jaipal by Mahmud Ghaznavi in 1000 A.D. Since then it had remained in the hands of the invaders. Its recapture meant the liberation of Northern India from the Afghan menace.

(3)

CONQUEST OF THE PATHAN CITADEL

The Maharaja was eager to extend his kingdom in the north-west by capturing Peshawar and its neighbourhood. He was waiting for a favourable opportunity to do so. He got it in the summer of 1818. At that time Wazir Fateh Khan of Afghanistan was murdered

by Prince Kamran, son of Shah Shuja's brother Mahmud. The Wazir's numerous brothers, who were spread out in different parts of Afghanistan, Peshawar and Kashmir, called for vengeance. So a civil war started in Afghanistan. Each party to the war was anxious to occupy Kabul. Hence the Afghan frontier with the Panjab was left undefended.

The Maharaja sent for Akali Phula Singh to whom the north-western frontier was well known. He questioned the Akali about attock and its surroundings. Akali Phula Singh replied, 'Attock is like a small island in the midst of a sea of turbulent tribesmen. If the north-western region is to be made secure against the Pathans and Afghans, the frontier will have to be extended to Peshawar. It will be better still to push up the frontier to the entrance of the Khaibar Pass. If we succeeded in doing that, the close alliance between the Afghans and the Pathan tribesmen will be broken. Then the most important gateway into India will be slammed in the face of the invaders from that direction.'

The Maharaja was much impressed by Akali Phula Singh's words. His resolve to capture Peshawar was strengthened. He felt that there was no time to lose. The Afghans were then engaged in a civil war. Their south-eastern frontier with the Panjab was left practically undefended. This fact would make his task much easier.

On October 15, 1818 the Maharaja marched out of Lahore at the head of his troops. Among the generals that he had with him were two who knew these lands

and the people, and whose names were a terror among the tribes. They were General Hari Singh Nalwa and Phula Singh Akali.

Passing through Rohtas, Rawalpindi and Hassan Abdal, the Darbar troops arrived in the plains of Hazara. From there a survey party was sent across the river Attock, by boat. The main army halted on the eastern bank. It was to cross when a suitable ford could be located by the scouts.

The western side of the river was inhabited by Khattak tribesmen. They ambushed the survey-party sent by the Darbar army, and destroyed it completely. Now, the place where this massacre occurred was within the Darbar's territories. The Khattak tribesmen paid tribute to the Maharaja. Hence, their brutal attack on the Darbar army's survey party was not an act of war. It was an act of treachery and rebellion. Those who had done it had to be punished.

The Maharaja was infuriated on hearing the news. He ordered his troops to get ready to "cross over. But the river was in high flood. It was seemingly impossible to cross it. The troops were lined up near the bank. The Maharaja shouted aloud 'Khalsaji' let us all pray to God. He can subside the flood; He can tame the river in no time. Let all fix their minds on the Almighty Father and pray.' The Maharaja then prayed to God and Satguru. The troops also prayed. Then he threw a tray of gold coins into the river as an offering. Then he rode his elephant into the fast flowing flooded river. According to legend current in the Panjab and the North Western Frontier, as soon as the Maharaja's elephant stepped into the river, the

flood subsided.* The horsemen plunged their horses in the river and reached the other bank. Others swam to that bank.

The Darbar army now fell upon the Khattaks. The latter did not put up much resistance. Their strongholds at Khairabad and Jahangiria were occupied. The Maharaja then pressed on to Naushera.

On hearing the defeat of the Khattaks, Muhammad Khan, the Afghan Governor of Peshawar, lost his heart. He ran away, leaving behind big guns and other war-materials in good condition.

The Maharaja entered the famous stronghold of the Pathans on November 19, 1818. He gave strict orders to his soldiers that none was to lay his hand on any person or property. A proclamation was then made by the beat of drum. The citizens were thereby assured that they would not be molested in any way. They were advised to carry on their occupation as usual.

The next morning, the Maharaja rode on his elephant through the bazars of Peshawar. He was cheered all along the route. It was the first time in seven hundred years that the citizens of Peshawar saw an Indian Conqueror ride through the streets.

The Maharaja stayed in Peshawar for four days. During that time, envoys came from Dost Muhammad Khan and Yar Muhammad Khan, brothers of Wazir Fateh Khan. The envoys made a present of fifty

*This legend had a great effect on the tribesmen's mind. It gave currency to a saying among them: '*Khuda ham Khalsa shud*'—Even God became Khalsa or identified Himself with the Khalsa,

thousand rupees, fifty loads of dry fruit, one hundred good horses, etc. They also delivered a letter from the two brothers. In it they prayed that they be entrusted with the administration of Peshawar. They agreed to pay a revenue of one lakh rupees a year. They added that they would abide by all orders of the Lahore Darbar, and accept the Darbar's title over the city. The Maharaja accepted the offer. Yar Muhammad Khan was made the Governor of Peshawar.

(4)

TO THE BORDERS OF CHINA AND TIBET

Very soon after returning from Peshawar, the Maharaja began to make plans for an all-out campaign to take Kashmir from the Afghans. Jabbar Khan, governor of Kashmir, was ruling with an iron hand. He treated the non-Muslims with utmost cruelty.

Many Hindus were compelled to leave the valley. One such person was Jabbar Khan's own Revenue Minister, Pandit Birbal Dhar. He came to Lahore and advised the Maharaja that it was a good moment to attack and take Kashmir.

Preparations were made for the attack. By April 1819, the Darbar forces assembled at Wazirabad. That place was to serve as the main base of operations and the Maharaja's headquarters.

A column of the Darbar army, under Prince Khark Singh, advanced up to Baramgulla without much resistance and then reached Shupaiyan. Another column of the Darbar army, under Misr Diwan Chand, also came up. The two columns were in view of each

other. They also came in view of Jabbar Khan with twelve thousand Afghans on the plain of Shupaiyan.

After allowing his troops a few days' rest Misr Diwan Chand quietly surrounded the Afghan host. Next morning, the Darbar's artillery opened fire on the Afghans. Jabbar Khan did not possess an adequate number of guns. He ordered his cavalry to charge. The Afghan horsemen captured a number of the Darbar army's guns. At this time, Akali Phula Singh and his Akalis fell upon the Afghan horsemen and infantry. The Afghans could not stand the Nihangs' charge. They turned and fled to the hills. Jabbar Khan was severely wounded. He barely escaped with his life.

Prince Khark Singh and Misr Diwan Chand entered Srinagar the next day. The Prince issued strict orders that none was to loot or molest the citizens in any way.

The Maharaja returned to the plains. He first went to Amritsar for thanks-giving. He returned to Lahore on September 22, 1819.

Kashmir was an important acquisition for the Panjab. It fetched seventy lakh rupees a year as revenue. Moreover, it extended the State's frontiers to the borders of China and Tibet.

TWO IRREPARABLE LOSSES

(1)

AKALI PHULA SINGH

Kashmir was taken by the Maharaja in 1819. Its administration was entrusted to Yar Muhammad Khan. But the Pathan tribesmen did not like to be under the government of Panjabis or their nominees. They rose in open revolt against Yar Muhammad Khan. They began to raise cries of *Jihad*. The chief instigator was Yar Muhammad Khan's elder brother Azim Khan. He aroused the religious sentiments of the Pathans. He proclaimed his intention of liberating the Pathans from the Panjabi infidels' yoke. The result of his instigation campaign was that the whole tribal area began to resound with cries of *Jihad*. In a short time, over twenty-five thousand *Ghazis* (Muslim crusaders) volunteered to fight as the Prophet's soldiers. They were determined to achieve victory or martyrdom.

With this huge host of *Ghazis*, Azim Khan advanced towards Peshawar in January 1823. Yar Muhammad Khan left Peshawar and hid himself in the neighbouring hills. Evidently, he was not

unwilling to hand over the city to his brother Azim Khan. Azim Khan occupied Peshawar without any difficulty whatsoever.

The Maharaja ordered his army to proceed northwards. Prince Sher Singh and General Hari Singh Nalwa led the advance columns. They crossed the river Attock by means of a boat-bridge. They came up to Jahangiria and occupied the fort there. The *Ghazis* came up and besieged the fort. Thus Prince Sher Singh and his companions found themselves surrounded on all sides by people thirsting for their blood. The siege operations were conducted by Azim Khan's brother, Dost Muhammad Khan, and Jabbar Khan. This Dost Muhammad Khan was the same man who, along with his brother Yar Muhammad Khan, had been entrusted with the administration of Peshawar. He had vowed to be loyal to the Maharaja.

The Maharaja arrived on the eastern bank of the river Attock. He found that the boat-bridge across the river had been destroyed by the Pathans. The river was in flood. It was impassable. The Pathan snipers made it impossible to make a fresh boat-bridge, across the river.

Soon the Maharaja was informed that the Pathans planned to destroy Sher Singh and his men the next day. Something had to be done at once. The river seemed impassable. But nothing daunted, the Maharaja ordered his soldiers to cross the flooded Attock as best as they could. He himself was the first to plunge his horse into the river. His army followed. The Maharaja and his army were soon in

control of the western bank. The *Ghazis* were taken by surprise. They took to their heels. Jahangiria and its garrison were saved.

After retreating from Jahangiria, the Pathans retrenched themselves in the plain outside Naushera. Between Naushera and Peshawar flowed the river Lunda. The army of Azim Khan could join the *Ghazis* at Naushera only after crossing that stream. That army was now approaching the Lunda.

The Maharaja consulted his generals. They advised him to attack and finish off the *Ghazis* at Naushera before Azim Khan's army could come to their aid. He concurred.

Early next morning, a religious gathering was held with Guru Granth Sahib in the midst of the assembly. After the morning service, prayers were offered for success of the campaign to be started that day. All present took vows to fight to the last and prayed for God's and the Guru's help in fulfilling their vows.

Soon the army was on the march. The Maharaja rode to a mound and took the salute from the troops going into action. As each group passed, raising shouts of *Sat Sri Akal*, the Maharaja acknowledged the salutation by raising his naked sword to his forehead and then he waved it in the direction in which the army was to march.

As this march past was in progress, news was brought to the Maharaja that Azim Khan was approaching the Lunda stream with a huge Afghan army and forty big guns. On hearing this news, the

Maharaja proposed that the offensive should be postponed till his General Ventura came up with the Darbar's artillery. He was expected to reach that very day.

But Akali Phula Singh would not agree to this postponement. He said, 'How can we break our word given to the Guru this morning? Having expressed his resolve before Guru Granth Sahib to go and fight to the last, no Sikh can tarry or turn back. I and my companions will keep our vow. We go into the fight. Come what may.'

So saying, Akali Phula Singh and his Nihangs raised shouts of *Sat Sri Akal*, and fell upon the *Ghazis*. The latter came down from the hill where they had taken up their position. They far outnumbered the Nihangs, and expected to finish them off in no time. Seeing this, the Maharaja ordered the rest of his army to advance and fall upon the *Ghazis*.

Akali Phula Singh was in the midst of severest fighting. A deadly hand-to-hand fight was going on between the Nihangs and the *Ghazis*. Akali Phula Singh was wounded in the thigh. He could not stand. He bandaged his wound and rode back into the thick of the battle on horseback. Then he got more wounds which made him still less capable of wielding any weapon. His horse was shot under him. He got into a howdah and drove the elephant into the midst of the enemy. The *Ghazis* could now see the man who had humbled them often. They fired at him from all sides. His body was riddled with bullets, but he went on roaring like a lion, till he collapsed on his elephant.

The news of his death further infuriated the Nihangs. They gave no quarter to the enemy. The Ghazis could not stand the Nihangs' charge. They got disorganised. At this critical moment, the Darbar cavalry rode into the disorganized masses of the Ghazis, and transfixed them with their lances.

In the meantime, Azim Khan had come up to the river Lunda on the west. Facing him on the eastern bank was the Darbar artillery under General Ventura. He could not cross the river. He helplessly watched the massacre of the Ghazis from the other side of the river. He could not come to their aid. By sunset the Ghazis were finished off or made to fly. Azim Khan was too ashamed to show his face to the people of Peshawar. He ran away to Afghanistan.

Three days later, the Maharaja entered Peshawar at the head of his victorious army. The citizens gave him a warm welcome. The city was illuminated at night.

A few days thereafter, Yar Muhammad Khan and Dost Muhammad Khan presented themselves before the Maharaja. They craved his pardon. He forgave them readily. Yar Muhammad Khan was again appointed Governor of Peshawar. The Maharaja then returned to his capital.

(2)

GENERAL HARI SINGH NALWA

As said already, Peshawar had been taken by Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Its control or administration had been

entrusted to Afghan chiefs. They paid stipulated tribute or revenue to the Maharaja. These chiefs had, a number of times, given proofs that they were not sincere and trustworthy. The Maharaja felt that, in order to make the North-West Frontier really secure, Peshawar should be brought under his direct control. Accordingly, he instructed Hari Singh Nalwa to take over the governorship of Peshawar from the Afghan Governor, Sultan Muhammad. This was done and the city was garrisoned by Panjabi soldiers.

On assuming the new charge, the Nalwa directed his attention to taming the semi-savage Pathan tribesmen who inhabited the country surrounding Peshawar. These Pathans had been, for centuries, persecuting and frightening the Panjabis. They held the Panjabis in utter contempt. Hari Singh Nalwa decided to compel them to change their attitude towards his people. He decided to teach them that the Panjabis were superior to them, and had to be regarded with respect and awe.

He felt that soft or half-hearted measures would be out of place when dealing with the semi-savage Pathan tribesmen. Hence he decided to be ruthless. Whenever the Pathans ambushed any Panjabis or shot at them from hidden places, Hari Singh Nalwa raided the Pathans' villages and destroyed their homes. Within a short time, the name of Hari Singh Nalwa became a terror in the tribal territory. So much so that, to this day, the Pathan women, when they want to frighten their children, say, 'Hush child, Nalwa is coming.'

Another step taken by him to make the land secure was to build a chain of forts. They were to be within



S. Hari Singh Nalwa
General

sight of each other. Two of them stood on the entrance of the Khaibar Pass. They were Shabkadar and Jamrud. They were fortified with special care. They were placed under the command of the Maharaja's ablest officers. Shabkadar was placed under the command of Lehna Singh Sandhawalia. It had a garrison of one thousand nine hundred. Jamrud, with a garrison of six hundred, was placed under the command of Mohan Singh.

On account of the measures taken by General Hari Singh Nalwa, Dost Muhammad of Kabul became agitated and angry. He concluded that the Maharaja was contemplating to attack Afghanistan. He hurried towards Peshawar. He addressed rude letters to the Maharaja. He told him to evacuate Peshawar or be prepared to taste the Afghan sword. The Maharaja wrote back in the same tone. He said that he would welcome a trial of strength between the Afghans and the Panjabis.

In one of his letters Dost Muhammad wrote : 'If out of haughtiness, the Maharaja does not pay heed to my request, I will gird up my loins for battle, and become a thorn in the courtyard of your rose garden. I will muster an army of crusaders who know nothing except fighting upto death, I will create tumult on all sides and a scene of chaos everywhere.'

To this Maharaja Ranjit Singh's answer was : 'We have broken the heads of refractory chiefs and put our foes in iron. If Dost, out of avarice and greed, desires to give us battle with the small force he has, let him come.....'.

Dost Muhammad applied to the English for help against the Maharaja. But they blankly refused to help him. Then he raised a cry of *Jihad* or holy war against the 'infidels from the Panjab'. He exhorted Muhammadans to rise to a man to destroy the Panjabis. He then learnt that the Maharaja was pre-occupied with Prince Nau Nihal Singh's marriage and that Hari Singh Nalwa was ill and confined to bed at Peshawar. He thought that that was a good time for him to start operations against the hated Panjabis.

So thinking, he started his campaign. His plan was to isolate the Panjabi garrisons at Shabkadar, Jamrud, and Peshawar, so that they should be unable to come to each other's relief. After such isolation, he planned, he would reduce them, one by one.

The first to receive attention was Jamrud. It was the most advanced outpost, nearest to Afghanistan. It was also the weakest link in the chain of the fortresses built by Hari Singh Nalwa. As said already, it had a garrison of six hundred under Mohan Singh's command.

Dost Muhammad's first move was to send one detachment of his army to Shabkadar. It was intended to prevent Lehna Singh from going out to aid Mohan Singh. His main army, numbering twenty-five thousand with fifty heavy guns, went and besieged Jamrud. To oppose this huge host, Mohan Singh had only six hundred soldiers and a few light guns. Evidently, the odds against him were too heavy.

Within a few hours, the Afghans' heavy guns fired their heavy shots and brought down the walls of the

fort in many places. Mohan Singh's men dug trenches. They used their muskets with deadly precision and remarkable effect. They were able to hold the Afghans at bay for four days. Then Mohan Singh sent word to Hari Singh Nalwa that he would be unable to hold out longer. This message was taken to Peshawar by a Sikh woman. Disguised as an Afghan, she stole through the Afghan army and reached Peshawar in a wonderfully short time. As soon as Hari Singh Nalwa got the message, he got up from his sick bed and hurried to Jamrud.

The Afghans were frightened to learn that the terrible Nalwa had risen. They at once raised their siege of Jamrud. They took up position in the valley of Khaibar, so as to have a safe route of escape in case of defeat.

Hari Singh Nalwa drew up his forces in battle formation and waited for the Afghans to attack him. The Afghans were thrice as many as his troops. But he was fully confident of victory. He knew that the Afghans did not possess the guts to withstand his Panjabi soldiers. He waited for seven days. All this time the two armies faced each other without going into action. Hari Singh Nalwa realized that the Afghans were too afraid to attack or engage in battle. Hence, on April 30, 1837, he ordered his troops to advance. The Panjabis drove the Afghans before them as the wind drives dry leaves. They captured eleven Afghan guns.

The Panjab army then started chasing the retreating Afghans. In the heat of the chase, Hari Singh

Nalwa's column got separated from the main army. Hari Singh Nalwa, riding an elephant, was ahead of his men, leading the attack on the fugitives. Dost Muhammad's son, Muhammad Akbar Khan, was watching the battle from an encampment on a hill. He saw that Hari Singh Nalwa and his men were far ahead of the main army. He swooped down on the Nalwa's column. He and his men directed their attack against Hari Singh Nalwa.

Hari Singh Nalwa was grievously wounded. He was taken back to Jamrud. He knew that his end was approaching. He gave orders to his officers that his death was to be kept a secret until the Afghans were driven beyond the Khaibar Pass. This feat was accomplished soon.

An Englishman, Dr. Wood, wrote an account of the battle and General Hari Singh's death. In it he wrote, 'Hari Singh received four wounds : two sabre cuts across his chest, one arrow was fixed in his breast which he deliberately pulled out himself, and continued to issue orders as before, until he received a gunshot wound in the side, from which he gradually sank and was carried off the field to the fort, where he expired, requesting that his death should not be made known until the arrival of the Maharaja's relief.'

On getting information of Hari Singh Nalwa's death, the Maharaja broke down with grief. He beat his breast in anguish and shed bitter tears. He soon controlled himself and started towards Jamrud. In one day he rode from Lahore to Jehlam, a distance of one hundred and sixty five kilometres. By the time

he reached Jamrud, the Afghans had been all driven beyond the Khyber Pass.

Hari Singh had sent to the Maharaja post haste reports about the hostilities which had broken out in the Peshawar province. In a letter accompanying the earliest of them, he had requested that his soldiers who had been sent for Nau Nihal Singh's marriage be sent back immediately. This report had been sent when the fighting had not yet actually begun.

As a matter of routine, these reports and the letter had been delivered to Dhian Singh. It was his duty to place them before the Maharaja. But out of motives not difficult to guess, he did not put them up before the Maharaja.

Then arrived the news of the Nalwa's death. On getting the news, the Maharaja broke down with grief. He beat his breast in anguish; he shed bitter silent tears; he could not utter a word for some minutes. Then he controlled himself. He enquired from Dhian Singh whether any earlier reports had been received. Dhian Singh told him of the reports and the letter in which Hari Singh had asked for the immediate return of his soldiers. Dhian Singh added that he had not thought it fit to show the reports and the letter to the Maharaja until he (the Maharaja) was free from his engagements concerning the Prince's marriage.

On hearing this, the Maharaja was filled with rage. He rebuked Dhian Singh in stern words. Some writers say that he struck Dhian Singh on the head with the *garva* that he was holding at the time. He

said, "you acted very wrongly. Peshawar and Hari Singh were more important to me than anything else. If I had been informed in time, I would have sent at once not only his soldiers, but also a large army to suppress the rising there. If you had shown me the reports and the letter immediately on their receipt, the life of my brave and seasoned general could have been saved. You have done a huge wrong and a very demaging disservice to the Panjab Darbar. You are responsible for causing us an irreparable loss."

Then he controlled himself and started towards Jamrud. In one day he rode from Lahore to Jehlam, a distance of one hundred and sixty five kilometres. By the time he reached Jamrud, the Afghans had been all driven beyond the Khaibar Pass.

The Afghans had failed to capture Shabkadar and Peshawar. They had been made to retreat from Jamrud. They had been driven beyond the Khaibar Pass. Still, they were in high spirits; for they said, 'What if the battle is lost? We have killed Nalwa who was worth a hundred and twenty five thousand men.'

SOME CHARACTERISTIC
ANECDOTES

(1)

EQUAL JUSTICE FOR ALL

(i)

Once a person from Gujranwala came to the Maharaja and made the following complaint :

‘Your general, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, has a *haveli* which adjoins mine in Gujranwala. Recently he has windened it by encroaching upon my land. He has high-handedly and wrongfully walled in, and added to his *haveli*, a few hundred square yards of my land. I pleaded with him and his men. Puffed up with power, they have paid no heed to my entreaties. I have come to my benevolent *Sarkar*, who is known to be just and a protector of the weak. I crave for justice.’

The Maharaja acted at once. He visited the place and made enquiries. He found that the complaint was genuine, that his general had, in fact, forcibly occupied that man’s land. He ordered the wall to be demolished and shifted back to where it justly should have been,

(ii)

Hukam Singh Chimni was a brave general and personal friend of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He was the *Nazim* or Administrator of Attock and Hazara. He had a personal grudge against a man named Said Khan, resident of Kot Hasan Ali. Unluckily, Said Khan was accused of some grave offence. Hukam Singh thought it to be a good opportunity to wreak his vengeance upon Said Khan. He did not make a full and thorough enquiry to find out the truth and establish the guilt or innocence of the accused. Most deliberately and unjustly, he sentenced Said Khan to death.

Said Khan's relatives took their complaint to the Maharaja. He had the matter thoroughly sifted. He was convinced that Hukam Singh had misused his authority in order to wreak personal vengeance. The Maharaja imposed on Hukam Singh a fine of one lakh and twenty thousand rupees. The amount was given to Said Khan's family. Hukam Singh was dismissed from his post.

(iii)

Maharaja Ranjit Singh had given strict instructions to all his officers that full and equal justice must be given to all people, high or low, that no leniency should be shown to an offender on account of his belonging to a high family or holding a high rank. His officers, with rare exceptions, obeyed the instructions in letter and spirit. Here is an instance out of hundreds.

Diwan Sawan Mal was the Governor of Multan. Once, a poor peasant came to him with a complaint.

He said, 'One of your sardars has used up my green crops to feed horses. He has paid me nothing by way of its price. I am a poor man. Help me, dear venerable Diwan Sahib.'

Diwan Sawan Mal called up all his courtiers and sardars. He told the peasant to recognize out of them the one who had wronged him. The peasant pointed at one of them. The man thus pointed out was the Diwan's eldest son, Ram Das. The Diwan ordered him to be put in prison. The orders were promptly carried out as desired by the Diwan.

The peasant later learnt that the person punished was Diwan Sawan Mal's son. He went to the Diwan and prayed that Ram Das be pardoned. But the Diwan did not accept his appeal. He said, 'If I don't punish a son of mine who has committed a crime, with what face can I punish other people's sons. Ram Das must remain in prison as ordered. "Equal justice for all" is our *Sarkar's* motto for us all.'

The Maharaja heard of this incident. He was immensely pleased with Diwan Sawan Mal's conduct. He conferred further honours and *jagir* on him.

(iv)

In 1830, the *zimindars* of Rawalpindi circle complained to the Maharaja that their revenue assessment done by his officers was unjust and excessive. The Maharaja assured them that full justice would be done to them. He sent General Ventura to assess a portion of the district. The General checked up the assessments of the *ilqa* of Rawalpindi, Takhtpuri, Banda, Mughal,

and Sayidpur. He found the assessment to be fair and even light.

But the *zimindars* were not satisfied even with General Ventura's decision. They remained uneasy and discontented. The Maharaja summoned the heads of tribes and villages to Lahore. He treated them with hospitality and distinction. After several days, he met them and heard what they had to say. Finding that their objections had some weight, he fixed comparatively light assessment. At the same time, he assured them that what they had suffered was not at his hands, but was the work of his officials. Still, he was sorry for it all. They returned to their homes fully satisfied.

The Maharaja conferred on them a still greater benefit than even the very light assessments. He transferred the chief official who had been responsible for their suffering. In his place, he appointed Bhai Dal Singh, who was a man of known integrity of character and amiable temper. Bhai Dal Singh treated the people in a manner that made him loved and respected. He was regarded and honoured by all as a just and faithful officer. The people were happy under him. They were grateful to the Maharaja for the kind treatment that they had got from him.

(2)

LOOKED UPON ALL 'WITH ONE EYE'

(i)

Once the Muhammedan residents of a village came to

the Maharaja with a complaint against their Hindu and Sikh fellow-villagers. They said, 'The Hindu and Sikh residents of our village don't let us say our *Azan* or Muslim call to prayer. They are thus acting against your declared policy of full religious freedom to followers of all religions. We have come to our dear *Sarkar* for justice. They are depriving us of our religious freedom. They should be made to desist from doing that.'

The Maharaja summoned some leading Hindu and Sikh residents of that village. He told them of the complaint brought against them. He desired them to let him know what they had to say in that connexion. They replied, 'Gracious Singh Sahib, may the Guru be still more kind to you ! If these good men look back in history a little, they will realize that they have no justification for their hue and cry against us. Under the rule of these people's co-religionists, we, Hindus and Sikhs, were denied religious freedom altogether. We could not perform our religious worship and rites. We were forbidden to ring bells, blow conch-shells or trumpets, and to sing our hymns even in our temples. Now, with the grace of our Gurus, we have Sikh rule in the Panjab. These people must get the same treatment under the Sikh rule as we got under the Muslim rule. It is just a case of tit for tat, our gracious Singh Sahib.'

The Maharaja said, 'You are labouring under a grievous misconception. What you have here in the Panjab now is not Sikh rule but Panjabi rule. You should all regard yourself as Panjabi first, and Sikhs, Hindus, or Muslims, afterwards. Far more

than being a Sikh, Hindu or Muslim is the fact of being a Panjabi. All have to get equal rights, equal freedom, equal opportunity, and equal justice. But, by the way, what is your objection to their *Azan* ?

The Hindu and Sikh leaders said, 'The same as they and their coreligionist rulers had against our conch-shells, trumpets, and bells. We hate to hear the very sound of their *Azan*. We have to shut our ears with our fingers when their *mullah* cries aloud at the top of his shrill sharp voice, from the top of his building. Our religious sentiments are hurt by the *Azan*. He says it not once or twice, but five times a day, beginning with one early in the morning, and ending with one quite late in the evening. We cannot tolerate it.'

The Maharaja said, 'I don't like that anyone's religious sentiments should be hurt.'

Then he turned to the muslim complainants and said, 'What for does your *mullah* cry aloud at the top of his voice from the top of his building.'

They replied, 'The *Azan* is a call to us for prayers. By crying aloud as he does, the *mullah* tells us that it is the time for *namaz* or prayer, and that all Muslims should assemble in the mosque, or say their prayers wherever they be at the time.'

The Maharaja said, 'But suppose we could devise another method of telling the Muslims of your village that it is the time for *Namaz*. Will that serve the purpose?'

The Muslims replied, 'If such be our just and gracious Sarkar's pleasure, and if it satisfies our friends here, it will serve our purpose all right.'

The Maharaja turned to the Sikhs and Hindus before him and said, 'I hereby forbid the *Azan* in your village ; but on one condition. You must take upon yourselves the responsibility of informing every Muslim of your village, wherever he be, at home or in the fields, that it is the time for *Namaz*. You will have to do that five times a day as the *mullah* does with his *Azan*. You must be punctual at all times. You must never fail to inform all Muslims of your village in time, that it is the time for *Namaz*. Do you agree ?'

The Hindus and Sikhs cried out, 'That is an impossible task for us. How can we run about, five times a day, to the houses and fields of these people, informing them that it is the time for *Namaz* ? We cannot take up that responsibility.'

The Maharaja said, 'Then let their *mullah* continue to inform them in his own way. More, you must all live as brothers, as sons of the same soil, as Panjabis.'

The Hindus and Sikhs had to yield. The Muslims expressed their gratitude to the Maharaja. They all—Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims—promised to live in peace and friendship, and respect each other's religious sentiments.

(ii)

Once a Muslim calligraphist came to Lahore. He had spent many years in making a copy of the holy Quran. He had taken it to all Muslim princes of India, one after the other. All of them admired the work. But none of them came forward to give him an adequate price for his labours. He then came to Lahore,

intending to sell it to Maharaja Ranjit Singh's Foreign Minister, Fakir Azizuddin. He presented it to the said Minister. The latter praised the work, but expressed his inability to pay for it. It was beyond his means, he said.

The Maharaja overheard what passed between them. He summoned the calligraphist to his presence. He asked him to give the book to him. On getting it, the Maharaja respectfully pressed the holy book against his forehead. Then, he scrutinized the writing with his single right eye. He was impressed with the excellence of the calligraphist's work. He bought it for his private collection.

Some time afterwards Fakir Azizuddin asked the Maharaja why he had paid such a high price for a book for which he, as a Sikh, could have no use. The Maharaja replied, 'God intended me to look upon all religions with one eye. That is why He took away the light from the other.'

(3)

KINDNESS AND GENEROSITY

(i)

It was the Maharaja's practice that, when famine occurred in any part of his kingdom, he made arrangements for free distribution of foodgrains among the affected people. Each family got its quota according to the number of its members. It was his custom to visit the distributing centres incognito, in order to see that all was going on the well and properly.

Once, famine occurred in Lahore and its suburbs. Centres were started for free distribution of foodgrains. The Maharaja, disguised as a rustic, went to see one of such centres. At a little distance from the centre, he saw a blind old man and a young child. A load of foodgrains lay between them on the ground. The Maharaja approached them and said, 'What is the matter, elder brother?'

The old man said, 'As you see, brother, I am old and blind. This boy here is my grandson. His father is dead. I have another grandson and three grand-daughters. Then there are their mother and grandmother. Thus we are a family of eight. We are *dhobis* (washermen) living at Muzang. We came here to get foodgrains being distributed free by our generous and kind *Sarkar*. His man gave us our quota for eight persons. The load is too heavy for us. We have a long distance to go. How to carry this load there is my problem. I wait and pray to God to send some strong kind-hearted man to help me.'

The Maharaja said, 'Then God has answered your prayer. I am going to Muzang myself. I shall carry the load to your house. Dear child, lead your grand-father and me to your house. Will you? There is a good boy.'

The old man blessed the kind-hearted stranger and thanked God for his having heard and answered his prayer. The Maharaja lifted the load and placed it on his head. Thus loaded, he followed the blind old man and his little grandson. He carried the load all the way from near the fort to Muzang.

He put down the load at the *dhobi's* door and turned to go. The old man thanked and blessed him sincerely and profusely. The Maharaja told him, 'Elder brother, I have only done my duty. Farewell.'

Just then a soldier in uniform came that way. He recognized the Maharaja in spite of the disguise. He saluted him and said, '*Jai Sarkar* !'

The Maharaja placed his finger on his lips as a sign to the soldier to keep mum. Then he quickly walked away to visit some other similar centre.

(ii)

Because of his open-handed generosity, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was generally called *paras* or Philosopher's stone. Poor men of no consequence, on coming in touch with him, became rich and important ; just as base metals, on touching *paras*, were believed to become gold.

Once he was riding on horse back through the streets of Lahore. Crowds of people cheered him as he went along, showering gold and silver coins this way and that. An old woman pierced through the crowd of spectators. She reached near the Maharaja's horse. She held an iron cake-pan (*tawa*), in her hand. Its bottom was coated with soot. She wanted to go up to the Maharaja. His bodyguard stopped her. She began to beseech and cry. The Maharaja heard her cry. He told the guard to let her come up. She was soon by his side, with iron *tawa* in her hand.

Then he said, 'Grandma, what do you want ? Tell me, be quick.'

The old woman said, 'I want to do this.' So saying, she began to rub his foot with the black, Soot-covered iron cake-pan. Some soot stuck to his foot. The guard took this action of hers as an insult to the Maharaja. He was about to push her away. The old woman cried, 'Let me finish, my child !' The Maharaja told the guard not to molest her. Then he said, 'Grandma, what have you done ? What do you want to finish ? And why ?'

She replied, 'Gracious Sarkar, people say that our Maharaja is *paras*. It is also said that if iron touches *paras*, it turns into gold. I am an old woman, with none to support me. I heard of your approach. I wanted to avail myself of this opportunity. I took up the only piece of iron I had in my house. I wanted to get it changed into gold, so that I may have enough for my needs. Hence it was that I tried to rub your feet with this iron cake-pan. But your guard does not let me finish this process, and achieve my objective. O *Paras*, permit me to touch your foot with the iron cake-pan, so that it may become gold.'

The Maharaja was much amused. He burst into a hearty laugh. 'Grandma, I did not know it.' Then he ordered his treasurer to give her gold equal in weight to the weight of her iron plate. His orders were carried out at once. The poor old woman became rich and went home, blessing the *Paras* Maharaja.

(iii)

Once, Maharaja Ranjit Singh was touring through the countryside on horseback. He was riding along a path near a village. Near the path there was a *ber* tree;

laden with red and yellow ripe fruit. Some boys were throwing stones at the tree in order to make some of the fruit fall on the ground.

The Maharaja approached, but the boys did not notice or mind him. They went on throwing stones at the *ber* tree, and enjoyed the *bers* that fell. By chance, a stone thrown by one of the boys struck the Maharaja on the back. He turned to see from where it had come. In the meantime, one of his attendants ran up to the boys whose stone had struck the Maharaja. He caught him by the neck and was about to beat him with his stick. The Maharaja shouted, 'Don't strike the lad. Bring him to me.'

The boy was brought to the Maharaja, all trembling with fear, shedding tears, and begging to be forgiven and released. The Maharaja said to him in a soft, kind voice, 'Don't fear, dear lad. Don't cry. Let me know why you threw the stone at me. Did you want to strike me ? Did you aim it at me ? Why ?'

'No, Sir,' said the boy, rubbing his eyes with the back of his fist. 'I did not aim it at you, sir, I did not intend to strike you, kind sir. I threw it at the *ber* tree, To my ill luck, sir, it struck you instead of the tree, you happened, sir, to be just where the stone was to fall. Pardon me, kind sir, I shall be careful in future. I shall never again let a stone strike any passerby.'

The Maharaja said, 'What would you have got if the stone had struck the tree instead of me ? Tell me, there is a good boy.' 'Kind sir,' said the boy, 'I expected that a handful of red and yellow fruit would fall for me to eat and enjoy ?'

The Maharaja said, 'I am not going to own or let it be said that I am worse than a *ber* tree. If a *ber* tree, on being struck with a stone, gives a handful of ripe fruit to him who strikes it, I then certainly should do something better.'

Then he turned to his treasurer and said, 'Let the boy make as deep and big a cup as he can by joining his open hands. Then fill that cup with gold coins. The tree would have given him a handful of red and yellow fruit. I give him a double-handful of yellow gold pieces.'

(4)

SWEET HUMILITY

(i)

Once the Maharaja happened to commit some lapse which constituted a breach of *Khalsa Rahat* or Rules of Conduct for the *Khalsa*. Some time thereafter, he came to Amritsar to pay homage at the sacred shrine. Akali Phula Singh used to stay at Amritsar and look after the gurdwaras. He came to know of the Maharaja's intended visit to the sacred temple. With a drawn sword in his hand, he ran to the entrance of the temple called the *Darshni Deohri*. He reached there before the Maharaja could do so. He stood in the Maharaja's way and said, 'Stop. A Sikh who has broken the *Khalsa Rahat*, as you have, cannot be allowed to enter the sacred temple.'

The Maharaja stepped back a few paces, folded his hands, and said in a humble tone, 'I admit my lapse,

I beg the Guru's *Sangat* to pardon me. I am prepared to suffer gladly the penalty that the *Sangat* may impose upon me for this lapse.'

After consultation with the Sikh congregation, Akali Phula Singh announced the following penalty. 'The Maharaja's arms should be bound behind his back with the trunk of a tamarind (*Imli*) tree that grows in front of the *Akal Takht* ; and twenty one whip-strokes should be struck on his body.'

The Maharaja, on hearing the *Sangat's* verdict, bowed his head, went up to the tamarind tree, and stood near it with his arms behind him, ready to be bound to the tree and whipped. A sturdy young Akali stood nearby, with a whip in his uplifted hand. He was looking at Akali Phula Singh and waiting for a signal from him. The Lion of the Panjab was standing with his arms bound behind him to the tree. His head was bowed in respectful acceptance of the verdict given by the Guru's *Sangat*. He was thus waiting for the whipman's strokes, watched by a crowd of people who were his subjects. The sight was most touching, indeed. Tears filled the eyes of all spectators.

Then Akali Phula Singh said aloud, 'O *Guru Khalsa*, the Maharaja is willing to bear the penalty imposed on him. See, there he stands, ready to receive the strokes. He is repentant. This is enough. I appeal to the *Guru Khalsa* to pardon him. If all present agree, let them shout *Sat Sri Akal*.'

Loud shouts of *Sat Sri Akal* were raised from all sides. The Maharaja was unbound. He was administered baptism afresh at the *Akal Takht*. Then he was allowed to enter the sacred temple.

(ii)

One day the Mahārāja, riding on his biggest elephant, was going in a procession in Amritsar. He passed by the balcony from which Akali Phula Singh was watching the procession. Akali Phula Singh said in a yelling voice. 'O, you one-eyed man, where did you get the he-buffalo you are riding on ?'

The Maharaja looked up, humbly joined his palms, and replied, 'It is the gift that your honour gave me.'

All wondered at the Akali's boldness and the Maharaja's humility.

(5)

FAITH AND DEVOTION

(i)

In 1826, the Nizam of Hyderabad, Deccan, sent to Maharaja Ranjit Singh an extremely beautiful and costly canopy as a present. Supported on silver poles it was put up on a plot in the Shalimar Gardens. At that time, the Maharaja was celebrating the annual Basant festival there. A big darbar was to be held there. Accompanied by his courtiers and Sardars, the Maharaja came to that place. Stepping under it, he looked up at the beautiful, costly canopy overhead. He at once stepped back from under it. So did also the courtiers and Sardars who had gone under it along with him. He said, 'This grand canopy is too grand for me. It is fit to adorn the *dardar* of the *Sachcha Patshah*, the true king. I am not fit to sit under it. It is fit only for the Guru's *Sangat* (Sikh congregation) that gathers at

the sacred temple in the city founded by Guru Ram Das. Let it be presented at that holy of holies. Take it down and send it there.'

His orders were obeyed. The canopy is now in the *toshakhana* of the Golden Temple, Amritsar and is spread over the Holy Scripture, Guru Granth Sahib, on great religious occasions.

(ii)

The Maharaja yearned to meet someone who had seen Guru Gobind Singh 'with his own eyes'. He was eager that such a one should describe to him the Guru's person and personal appearance. 'It will be a blessing and great pleasure,' said he, 'to meet and talk to such a blessed grand old person.'

He sent instructions to all his officers in all places to try to find out some such person. The search was successful at last. An old Muslim, aged well over a hundred years, was found who had seen Guru Gobind Singh. He was brought to Lahore by means of special comfortable conveyance. He was brought before the Maharaja. The very sight of the aged blessed man sent a thrill of joy through the Maharaja's heart and frame. He got up from his seat, ran to meet him, hugged him, and planted several kisses on his eyes, saying, 'Blessed are these eyes of yours with which you saw my Master, Guru Gobind Singh. Blessed are you who saw him with your these eyes.'

Then the Maharaja touched the old man's feet most reverentially, wiped off dust from those feet, and applied it to his eyes and forehead. Then he went round the

grand old man a number of times, as one goes round a sacred person or place. He kept the man as his honoured guest in his palace for several days.

Whenever the Maharaja desired the old man to describe the Guru's person and personal appearance, the latter would go into a trance, with eyes closed and head bowed. On coming to himself, he would say, 'The Guru's face shone with such glorious light that it dazzled the beholders' eyes. All I can recollect is that his arms reached well below his knees. I have seen none other with arms so long. Have you seen one, Gracious Sarkar ?'

After several weeks, the old man was bidden respectful farewell. He was given a large sum in cash and a number of rich presents. He was then seated on a well-decorated elephant and sent home. The Maharaja and his courtiers walked by his side beyond the gates of the fort.

(iii)

Once there came to Lahore a celebrated painter. He persuaded a number of the Maharaja's courtiers to recommend him to the Maharaja. He wanted to draw a portrait of the Maharaja. The courtiers made the request at an opportune time. But the Maharaja refused to let his portrait be painted by anyone. On their insistence, he said, 'I agree on one condition. The painting should show Guru Nanak Dev seated on a throne, and my head placed on his sacred feet.'

The painter said that in a portrait the face was the most important part to show the painter's art and skill.

In the position suggested by the Maharaja, his face would be hidden.

The Maharaja said, 'Well, the first painting shall have to be as I have said. Afterwards you may prepare another. In that the Guru should be shown sitting on a throne and I, standing before him, praying, with palms joined together.'

Accordingly, the painter prepared two portraits as desired by the Maharaja. They were hung up in the gurdwara room in the Maharaja's palace. The painter was richly paid for his labour.

(iv)

The great Maratha leader, Hulkar, was defeated by the British Commander, Lord Lake. Hulkar and his Rohilla confederate, Amir Khan, fled to Amritsar. They intended to seek help from the Sikhs. Hulkar visited the sacred temple and made rich offerings. This he did in order to earn the Sikhs' good opinion.

Lord Lake pursued them and came up to the Beas with his army. Both Hulkar and Lake sent messengers to Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who was then at Multan. Hulkar prayed for help against the English. Lord Lake requested him not to give any help to his enemy.

The Maharaja was faced with a complex problem. He realized the gravity of the situation. He sent word to all his principal Sardars to join him at Amritsar. He wanted to seek their advice.

A meeting of the *Sarbat Khalsa* was called at the *Akal Takht*. It was attended by the leading Sikh chiefs

and dignitaries. Both sides of the case were presented. On the one side were the refugees, Hulkar and Amir Khan. They had sought shelter and protection. It was a matter of honour for the Khalsa to protect them, not to send them away disappointed. On the other side were the English who demanded that the Maharaja should expel Hulkar from the Panjab. 'If he is not expelled,' they added, 'we shall attack him where he be. The Anglo-Maratha conflict will then be extended to the Maharaja's domains. The consequences will be serious for the Panjab and Panjabis.'

The problem was knotty in the extreme. No unanimous decision could be arrived at. At last the Maharaja decided to have resort to the Guru. 'Let the Guru decide for us,' said he. He went to the sacred temple and prayed for guidance. Then he took two slips of paper. He had the name of Lord Lake written on one of them and that of Hulkar on the other. He folded them several times and placed them before Guru Granth Sahib. Then he prayed, '*O Satguru*, guide me. Give me your orders. Whose request I should accept? Which side I should support.' Then he picked up one of the slips. It bore the name of Lord Lake.

So the Guru had decided for him. He refused to get involved in the Anglo-Maratha conflict. He decided to mediate for a settlement between the two. He was successful. Hulkar departed in peace and in high spirits.

(v)

Maharaja Ranjit singh was gifted with another excellent unique trait of character. It was, no doubt, a product of his humility. He had so thoroughly imbibed the

Sikh spirit of democracy, that he never claimed any superiority for himself. He used to say that the kingdom really belonged to the Guru; that he was only its watchman. He ever remembered Guru Nanak's words—*'bhullan ander sabh ko, abhulla Guru Kartar'*—Everyone is liable to err, only the Creator is infallible.' Consequently, he was ever ready and willing to admit his error. He was ever open to correction and conviction.

Something still more rare and unprecedented or unparalleled ! In his book entitled *Real Ranjit Singh*, Fakir Sayed Waheed-ud-Din has reproduced, in a fascimile, two of the Maharaja's farmans in which he had authorised two of his subordinate officers, Fakir Sayed Nur-ud-Din and Sardar Amir Singh of Lahore to withhold and bring to his notice for amendment, any order of the Maharaja himself, of the princes royal, of the Prime Minister, or of the Chief Sardars of, in the opinion of the Syed or the Sardar, the order was inappropriate. Surely, nowhere else in the history of the world one can find an order of this nature, issued by an absolute monarch, authorising a subordinate officer of the state to withhold any order issued by the king himself, if, in the opinion of that officer, it appeared to be inappropriate, was there ever in the world another king so willing to bow before his subordinate officers' opinion ?

THE PANJAB RENDERED A WIDOW

(i)

SUPREME SACRIFICE

In the summer of 1817, Maharaja Ranjit Singh went on a hunting expedition. He spent the whole day on horse-back in chasing game. He felt extremely hot. On returning to the camp, he took copious draughts of ice-cold water and then jumped into a tank of cold water. He caught a severe chill. It was followed by a high fever. He was brought back to Lahore in a palanquin. There his condition took a serious turn for the worse. It was feared that he would die. The doctors pronounced his case as hopeless.

This pronouncement shook to the core one of his Sardars, Nihal Singh Atariwala. He resolved to sacrifice his own life and save the Maharaja's life. It occurred to him how Babar had gone round the bed of his sick son and prayed that his son's illness and fate be passed on to him, and his own life given to his son. Nihal Singh Atariwala resolved to follow that example. Accordingly, he went round the Maharaja's bed three times and prayed that the Maharaja's life be spared and his taken instead thereof.

His prayer was accepted. The Maharaja's condition began to improve. Nihal Singh Atariwala became ill. After a few days, the Maharaja was fully recovered and Nihal Singh was dead.

(ii)

STRUGGLE WITH DEATH

About eighteen years went by since Nihal Singh Atariwala had made the supreme sacrifice. In August 1835, the Maharaja fell seriously ill again. This time also he caught a chill under somewhat similar circumstances as in 1817. He had a stroke of paralysis from which he recovered gradually.

Early in 1837, he had a second and more serious stroke of paralysis. His whole right side was affected. Its effects lasted for nearly six months.

The third stroke, from which he could not recover, was brought about by the strain of festivities at Ferozepur in honour of Lord Auckland's visit. On the eve of the Christmas of 1838, the Maharaja was taken violently ill. For the next five days he hovered between life and death. But by the New Year, he was a bit better and was taken to Lahore. The stroke completely deprived him of his power of speech. He had to communicate by signs.

By February 1839, his health improved a bit. He went to Amritsar to pray for his health. He gave away large sums for charity. He made rich offerings at the shrines of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. There was a little improvement, but his condition continued to cause anxiety.

The winter passed into summer. The summer's heat made the Maharaja more restless than ever before. By the end of May, he had no doubt in his mind that his days were numbered. Prayers for his recovery were held in mosques, temples and gurdwaras. Ten maunds of bread was distributed to the poor every day. Large numbers of cows, horses and elephants, and large quantities of gold and silver were given away to holy men and shrines.

But neither prayers nor charities helped the ailing Maharaja. No Nihal Singh Atariwala was there to take over the Maharaja's illness and death with his devotion and sincere prayers. Soon, he developed palpitation of the heart. The end did not seem far off. Early in the morning of June 20, 1839, he was once again seized with fever. He had a discharge of blood from the nose. On the advice of Fakir Azizuddin, the Maharaja entrusted the government to Prince Khark Singh with Raja Dhian Singh Dogra as his Chief Minister. He made the latter take a vow that he would remain faithful to Khark Singh and his son, Prince Naunihal Singh, and work for the best welfare of the State.

The Maharaja's condition went on getting worse and worse. He was now sure that he was dying. His last act was that of a dying soldier. He summoned his courtiers to his bed-side. He gave away to them swords, shields, lances, pistols, and matchlocks with his own hands. The courtiers wept bitterly and loudly as they took the gifts. The Maharaja tried to console them, but he himself broke down many times.



Raja Dina Nath
Finance Minister

On June 26, he became unconscious. All hopes of recovery were given up. Orders were given for the preparation of a magnificent costly bier. He regained consciousness for a few minutes.

But the end came on the evening of June 27, 1839, corresponding to Asar 15, 1896*. When this became known, the *Ranis*, Prince Khark Singh, Raja Dhian Singh and others 'raised their voices in lamentation, tearing their hair, casting earth on their heads, throwing themselves on the ground, and striking their heads against walls and stones. This continued during the night by the side of the corpse. Every now and then, looking towards the corpse, they made their shrieks louder and shriller.'

The Maharaja's body lay in state, with oil lamps burning on all sides. The wailing and lamentation went on throughout the night. Raja Dhian Singh was louder than others in lamentation and wailing. He announced his intention to burn himself on the Maharaja's funeral pyre. Prince Khark Singh and the principal Sardars placed their turbans on his feet and begged him to change his mind. They succeeded. He changed his mind.

Four *ranis* and their seven maid servants also announced their intention to burn themselves on the Maharaja's pyre and become *Satis*. All efforts to dissuade them proved ineffective. Rani Guddan, (Rani Mehtab Devi) daughter of Raja Sansar Chand Katoch

*By a curious coincidence, it was just on this day (Asar 15) exactly forty years earlier, that he had entered Lahore as a victor, i.e. on Asar 15, 1856.

was one of the four *ranis* bent upon becoming *Satis*. She thought it to be the most opportune time to get an oath of loyalty to the State from Raja Dhian Singh. She took his hand, placed it on the dead Maharaja's chest and made him swear that he would not betray Maharaja Khark Singh or his son, Prince Naunihal Singh. She also made him swear that he would work for the best welfare and integrity of the State. Similarly, she made Maharaja Khark Singh swear that he would trust Raja Dhian Singh. She added, 'The torments of hell due for the slaughter of a thousand cows will be visited on him who breaks this oath.'

The next morning, the Maharaja's body was placed on a sandalwood bier. It was taken in a procession through the streets of Lahore full of mourning crowds. It came to the garden at the foot of the fort-wall, near the temple Dehra Sahib marking the site of Guru Arjan Dev's martyrdom. The body was placed on the funeral pile of sandalwood. Rani Guddan set near the corpse and placed the head of the deceased on her lap. The other *ranis* with seven maid servants seated themselves around the corpse, with every mark of satisfaction on their countenances.

The last prayers were said by members of all communities—Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The prayers lasted nearly an hour. Then late Maharaja Khark Singh set fire to the pyre. The Maharaja of the Panjab, with four *ranis* and seven maid-servants, was reduced to ashes. As the pyre was burning, a pair of pigeons came flying fast and plunged headlong into the flames. They, too, became *Satis*.

Raja Dhian Singh Dogra attempted four times to jump into the burning pyre, but was held back by the multitude and his brothers.

‘A few drops of rain from the gathering clouds fell upon the raging fire; but as it quickly stopped, the whole crowd that had assembled attempted to jump into the fire, but were with difficulty prevented from doing so.’

The Maharaja's death plunged the whole country into intense grief. Everyone felt as if he had lost his own father and guardian. With his death, it was said everywhere, the Panjab had become a widow.

‘Although Maharaja Ranjit Singh is no more, and his dust returned to dust over a century ago, yet he lives in the memory of the people, and in the songs of the youth and maidens of the country as a maker of the Panjab and as a National Hero of the Land of Five Rivers.’

